**Episode Title:** Madhur Jaffrey and the Trap of Perfection

**Episode Summary:** When Madhur Jaffrey published "An Invitation to Indian Cooking" in 1973, she had no idea that half a century later, the book would not only still be in print, but also get an anniversary reissue that will welcome future generations in the vast and varied cuisine of her homeland. In the twelfth episode of Tinfoil Swans, Food & Wine's executive features editor Kat Kinsman finally meets her lifelong culinary hero and gets some sage advice from the writer, teacher, and actress about self worth, righteous anger, perfectionism, and what actually matters to you when you turn 90.

**Episode Type:** Full  
**Episode Rating:** Clean  
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**Episode Transcript:**

**Music:** Tinfoil Swans Music begins

**Kat Kinsman (VO):**

Welcome to Food & Wine’s Tinfoil Swans, a weekly podcast serving up inspiring, touching, hilarious, revealing conversations with some of the biggest names in the food and beverage world and — we hope — giving you plenty to savor even after the episode is over. I'm your host Kat Kinsman, executive features editor at Food & Wine, and I'm eternally fascinated by how successful, creative people become, well, themselves. What are the moments, influences, missteps, pep talks, and decisions — big and small — that got them where they are today?

There's this thing that people say about how you should never meet your heroes and hey, maybe that's true in some cases, but when it comes to Madhur Jaffrey — it couldn't be further from the truth. No one in the world has had more of an influence on my love for food than this absolute legend. There may be no one else in the world who's had a bigger influence on how people outside of Indian culture understand and appreciate the bounty and beauty of its wildly diverse cuisine.

When she published *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* in 1973, she had absolutely no idea what an impact this book would make — and that 50 years later it would still be in print, and even getting an anniversary reissue. Madhur Jaffrey turned 90 just a couple days before we recorded
this, and I have to be completely honest, I woke up shaking at the notion of getting to sit down with this incredible human being to talk about her career as a film and TV star, cookbook author, memoirist, and cultural ambassador. But I met my hero, and I cannot wait for you to listen to our conversation.

Welcome to Season 1 Episode 12 of Tinfoil Swans, Madhur Jaffrey and the Trap of Perfection

Music: Tinfoil Swans Music Fades Out

Kat Kinsman:
I cannot tell you how lucky I feel getting to talk to you. Anybody who works with me knows that I woke up with a panic attack (laughs) this morning because honestly, I've wanted to tell you this for a long time, but I don't think there's anybody in the world who has had more of an impact and effect on my love of food and the reason that I do this for a living (laughs). So to get to talk with you is a huge, huge honor.

Madhur Jaffrey:
Well, thank you. Thank you hugely.

Kat Kinsman:
I've told this story to other people, but I came home, from church, when I was maybe 10 years old. And, my dad did the cooking on Sundays, because my mother ran the religious program there. And I walked in, and the house just smelled different than it ever had before. And I think it was like the moment in The Wizard of Oz when everything goes from black and white to color, and he had bought

Madhur Jaffrey:
(laughs)

Kat Kinsman:
This is an audio medium, so folks can't see it. But it is your World of the East Vegetarian Cooking, and it changed everything in my house and made me curious about food.

Madhur Jaffrey:
Well, tell me what he cooked. I'm curious to know. Do you remember?

Kat Kinsman:
I do, very vividly. And also, I was trying to see what pages this flips (laughs) open to most easily. It is noodles, pancakes and breads. Cold noodles with the peanut sauce.

Madhur Jaffrey:
I love those things to this day.

**Kat Kinsman:**
As well you should. You wrote this for the ages (laughs), and there was a spice rice with nuts and raisins.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
I remember them. And I remember I think my kids were going to college, and they said, "give us some recipes to take." So I said, "You know, take this, take that." And I gave them some books, but they wanted one particular recipe. And, they've been making it for years, and it was a, a mixed recipe that I created, wasn't vegetarian. It was pork chops. But then I added soy sauce and ginger and all kinds of other things and make it slightly Asian and slightly Indian. It was spicy, but it was slightly Asian. And that's what they took to college (laughs), I remember, with them.

**Kat Kinsman:**
(laughs) I've done all my homework for, lo, these many years about you and you essentially, as I understand it, started to cook out of homesickness, but by writing to your mother.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
Right. So I was in London. I was about 20 years old, and I was at a drama school, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. And I remember The canteen was five floors up, so you walked up five floors. And then you got this see-through roast beef that was so very gray.

**Kat Kinsman:**
(laughs)

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
And you got these potatoes that were over-watery and gray and cabbage that was gray. And I went, "Oh my God, I cannot eat this."

**Kat Kinsman:**
(laughs)

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
And then I would dream of my mother's cooking. And so I thought, "You know, I can't cook, but I can write to her." So I wrote her a letter and said, "Please, please, teach me how to cook." And she sent me back air letters. They were those flimsy air letters at that time. And in it, she wrote three-line recipes: take a little cauliflower, take a little potato, brown them, and then put some, these spices in them and cook till done.
Kat Kinsman:
Till done (laughs).

Madhur Jaffrey:
So it was those three-line recipes. But the funny thing was, and I realized this so much later, that I remember the taste of what I’d eaten. And that is food memory, which I now consider very important. So if you can remember what it tasted like, it’s not so hard to recreate it, even with three blanks given as a hint. You can take that hint and develop it because then it fills in a lot of blanks in your food memory, and you can create it. So that was a discovery, but that came many, many years later. But at that time I was able to do it somehow.

Kat Kinsman:
That also came from having grown up eating these things from your mother, and I just, I think it's fascinating. I grew up with these tastes translated by my dad as written (laughs) by you.

Madhur Jaffrey:
Right. So you got a triple image of them in a way. Yes.

Kat Kinsman:
It is. And the thing about the book also is that it caused us to go around looking for the ingredients because I was growing up in suburban Kentucky.

Madhur Jaffrey:
Good grief. Yes, yes.

Kat Kinsman:
(laughs) And as I understand it also, when you were living in London, maybe some of these ingredients, how hard were they for you to find?

Madhur Jaffrey:
Strangely enough, not hard. Because there was a shop called Bombay Emporium that was very near my drama school. so I could actually, after drama school, I could go there, pick up the stuff, and take it home and try cooking with it. England is very strange. I mean, they were part of India for so long, and they loathed India and loved India at the same time. There was a love/hate relationship between... both sides were the same. We hated and loved them, and they hated and loved us. And we liked certain aspects of them, which we ate, and we hated other aspects of the British rule, the British raj, which we hated. So it was that kind of relationship, but it was intense. It was an intense relationship. And we remember it to this day and we still survive in that kind of intense love/hatred (laughs) relationship. So nothing is forgotten in a way. Everything is remembered, but it has its own layers and colorings, I would say, because of our own particular experiences.
**Kat Kinsman:**

I feel almost ashamed that it’s only through recent pop culture that I’ve come to have any knowledge of and understanding of Partition and what all of that meant. I was watching Ms. Marvel, and very vivid description of it. And you have written about living through that. And I can imagine that is such a huge part of the hate and feeling the pain.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**

It is, because they were cruel. The British were cruel in the way they just parted India into bits and pieces. There was Pakistan to the right of us, Pakistan to the left of us, later became Bangladesh. They just divided us hither and thither, people were getting onto trains to go to another part, and then they were attacked and killed and then people were coming from the Pakistani side to us, and they were attacked and killed. Everyone was killing everybody else and they gave people a chance to have a field day in killing. And they just washed their hands of it, "Okay, let it be over." And then we part, we’ve gone. We’ve done our bit. But they left us in such a bad way, and all of us, it’s part of our lives. It’s part of our hearts and brains, whatever happened, for those of us who remember, who were alive at the time of Partition.

**Kat Kinsman:**

It feels like that's gotta be a deep psychic, wound that passes down through generations

**Madhur Jaffrey:**

Yes. People, especially from the Punjab, who came to India, I know their stories. The other side, I don’t know their stories because we don't know what happened. My friends who went to Pakistan, I later went to Pakistan and looked for some of them. I didn't find any. It’s just hard. It's very hard, but you just sort of be cut off in a bad way that the British encouraged. So on that subject, I have no good feelings for the British, but I do on others. I like their books. (laughs)

**Kat Kinsman:**

And you also do like their music (laughs) as well. Because I was just listening to a 1985 Desert Island Discs-

**Madhur Jaffrey:**

Oh yes, yes, yes.

**Kat Kinsman:**

... that you had recorded,

**Madhur Jaffrey:**

Colin Davis was a good friend of ours. He was a British conductor, and we adored him. And we saw him often, and we cooked Indian food for him when he was here. So we have our own, funny relationships with the British.
Kat Kinsman:
I'm working on a story right now that has to do with my husband's family and his aunt having to leave her place very suddenly in the middle of the night because it burned down. I actually have her cookbooks and some of her recipes that made it through the fire. And they're singed, but I have them. When you're forced away from your home, how do you keep those parts of you alive and those parts of your culture? And especially where that intersects with food, how do you keep that with you?

Madhur Jaffrey:
I don't know. I mean, I wasn't in that position. I never had to leave my home.

Kat Kinsman:
Mm-hmm.

Madhur Jaffrey:
I left voluntarily because I wanted to go to the West.

Kat Kinsman:
Mm-hmm.

Madhur Jaffrey:
So it was a thoughtful, meaningful decision for me. I wasn't thrown out. But for those who were, who had this awful choice of going to Pakistan or coming from what was now Pakistan into India, that must've been very hard. I think the Pakistanis chose it more easily. More of the Indians hated the Partition. More of the Pakistanis wanted it because they wanted a land for themselves. They thought India was not fair to them, and they may be right. And India may not have been fair to them, because look at India now. I mean, we are certainly not fair to Muslims and Christians at the moment. But we are whatever we are. We are a country that's growing and becoming a, hopefully, a great, grand country. But I hope we learn as we go along that tolerance for other people is so important. It is really imperative that we care for all the people that are in our country.

Kat Kinsman:
This is extremely true. How old were you when this all occurred?

Madhur Jaffrey:
I must have been around 12, 13, when the Partition happened. So it was a very vulnerable time, but I went everywhere. I listened to Gandhi. I went to see when India, the Independence Day. I went to the place where the flag was put up and people threw their hats in the air and everything else. I watched Gandhi being cremated. I walked to that place. So I am a part of all that and remember Gandhi being shot. And everybody coming out of their houses onto the lanes outside that connected us to other people and saying, "My God, what a terrible thing has
happened. What an awful thing has happened." And commiserating with all our neighbors who also came out into the street. So I mean, these are deep memories. They're not good memories. They are, in a way, some bad memories, but they're so deep inside us that they are part of us now.

**Kat Kinsman:**
At that point, because I know you didn't come to cooking until later. What did you want for yourself at that age? When you were young, when you were 10 years old, what did you see that you wanted for yourself?

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
I think I wanted to do something with my life, but I didn't know what. I know that very early, I knew I didn't want to end up like my mother, just being a housewife. I wanted to be more than that. It wasn't clear to me how I would do that. So very early on we had a lady who was a doctor. We called her a lady doctor because she was a lady and a doctor.

**Kat Kinsman:**
(laughs)

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
And she was very much fighting for independence at that time, and was a part of the congress party that was fighting for independence. So she wore all cardi, which is hand-loomed cloth saris. And she smelt of disinfectant, and she was such a good doctor. And she went around both working and fighting for independence. So I said, "I want to be a doctor," only because she was doing something. And then when I was in school, we had in school a girl. She was half Jewish, half Muslim. And she was a blonde. She was a total blond from her mother's side. And she would swear and curse and paint like Picasso, not like we were being taught to paint in bold, splashy colors. And I wanted to be a painter. I thought, "Oh, This is what I want to be." I think it's the breaking from the traditional role of the woman that I was yearning for, though it took many forms before I got to the one I found. But it was just, I cannot be like my mother. I adored my mother, but I was not going to be like her. I was going to do something with my life, and I was copied different people at different times, but then eventually I found what I wanted to do.

**Kat Kinsman:**
How did you find that? It takes a certain amount of bravery to step away from the familiar and the expected. Were there people in your life who modeled that for you or who encouraged you in this, or were people saying, "No, you have to fall in line"?

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
There was no one. My mother suggested arranged marriage for me. I said, "No." And then she didn't push it anymore. She just (laughs) said, "Okay, if you don't want it, you don't want it."
Kat Kinsman:
(laughs)

Madhur Jaffrey:
I was the fifth child. And my oldest sister who was thoroughly educated, she lives in England now and she's such an intellectual. I'm not, she is. And she took over my life in a way of suggesting things to me and helping me when I was all agitated and didn't know what to do. She would suggest things, do this, do that. And I trusted her more because she had the same background as I did, not my mother. My mother had not gone to school beyond the eighth grade 'cause they said she was so pretty. She was white. Her skin was so white that they said, "Oh, she, she's pretty." India, if you're white, you're pretty. So she was light skinned, so light skinned, like a milk and honey complexion, so everybody thought, she'll find a good husband anyway. We don't have to educate her. So she was educated only until the eighth grade. And after she died, we found all these medals and pins that she'd won for scholarship. But nobody cared then. So she was married off to my father, who came from a wealthy family. So she was like, did so well for herself being so light skinned. So you know, that was her aim in life to please my father, and she was a wonderful wife to my father and a daughter. So we had that in the background, this lovely relationship of our parents all the way through. So I just felt freer, with my sister's help, to do what I wanted to do, whatever. It kept changing.

Kat Kinsman:
So, very much acting (laughs)

Madhur Jaffrey:
Very much acting. So I started acting very, very early, but didn't think of it as a profession until much later. I started acting when I was five, but it didn't become a profession until much later.

Music: Tinfoil Swans Theme Song Fades In then Out

Kat Kinsman:
We’ll be back with more from Madhur Jaffrey after the break…

(Break)

Kat Kinsman:
Welcome back to Tinfoil Swans. Today I’m chatting with Madhur Jaffrey

Music: Tinfoil Swans Theme Song Fades In then Out

Kat Kinsman:
When you’re five, what kind of work are you doing at that age?
**Madhur Jaffrey:**
They were musical concerts in our school. So one was *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, and I was the brown mouse.

**Kat Kinsman:**
(laughs)

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
My first role at five was a brown mouse. And I remember that in the intermission they gave us hot chocolate. It was wonderful. I loved acting. I loved getting away from who I was. I didn't like myself too much.

**Kat Kinsman:**
Why is that?

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
I don't know. I never did like myself.

**Kat Kinsman:**
I don't know if people talk about this often enough, but it's a lot of work to come around to liking yourself and accepting yourself.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
Yeah. I don't know if I've still done it. It's hard.

**Kat Kinsman:**
It's a work in progress.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
Yes.

**Kat Kinsman:**
It's a balance, I feel like, being a person who wants to do things and achieve things, and you know what you don't want to do, but then having that nagging thing in your head about like, not liking yourself and second guessing. Do you have a way of silencing that voice?

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
Not a good way. I don't know it. I mean, I try all the time, but I'm really so upset with myself for being such a not nice person all the time. I say, "I could be kinder, I could be this, I could be more patient, I could more this." But I don't achieve it quite.
Kat Kinsman:
Is it your own voice telling you that, or do you hear someone else's voice? For me, a lot of it is the nuns from my (laughs) elementary school.

Madhur Jaffrey:
Your nuns. I had nuns too, because we were all sent to Catholic schools, you know? No, it's not the nuns' voices so much, it's my own voice. I know what I am, and I know I could be much better.

Kat Kinsman:
And is this something where you feel like it's something that you want to keep working on or just accept, about yourself? Because we're never all gonna get there.

Madhur Jaffrey:
No, we're not.

Kat Kinsman:
(laughs)

Madhur Jaffrey:
And I think the thing is not be too hard on oneself and not to be too hard on other people.

Kat Kinsman:
Do you allow yourself to appreciate all of the things that you've achieved? Because let's go through the laundry list here (laughs). You've written some globally changing cookbooks, one of which is going to have its 50-year anniversary reissue. You've made incredible films. You have taught people to cook. You have done incredible things with your life. Are you able to take that in and allow yourself to enjoy your process then?

Madhur Jaffrey:
Not much (laughs).

Kat Kinsman:
(laughs)

Madhur Jaffrey:
Not much.

Kat Kinsman:
You've achieved all these things. But you had moved to London. you're at RADA. You're studying, talk to me about getting into that school and deciding hey, this is what I'm going to do seriously.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
What happened was that in India, we had just become independent. And India didn't have very much foreign currency, so they couldn't give us foreign exchange to go and study anywhere. So we had to get scholarships. That was the only way. So I was trying to get scholarships, and I remember doing a play called *Auto-Da-Fé*, which is the one act by Tennessee Williams. And we were doing on the stage. I was part of a theatrical group. And we were doing this play, and various people came to see it, including the British consul. So then he said, "Oh, we'll give her a scholarship." (laughs) And then they suggested me to RADA, so RADA said, "we'll give you a scholarship, but you have to come here and audition first." So I went to England, I did an audition, and then I was accepted. And that's how I got in.

**Kat Kinsman:**
What I also really love is that you have been on a bunch of sitcoms in recent years. I remember when you showed up on *New Girl*

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
(laughs) Yes, that was fun with all these young girls. My goodness, I had such a good time with them.

**Kat Kinsman:**
I was listening to a podcast with one of the actors on it, and she was saying that she couldn't believe (laughs) that they had gotten you. And she was just kind of losing her mind about that, but you were recently on *And Just Like That*.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
Yes.

**Kat Kinsman:**
And I know that you are fundamental to the Merchant Ivory relationship as well.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
Yeah, we started out together. We were all in New York at the same time, and then we all planned to do a film together, and we used to sit in Jim's apartment on the floor and write out Shakespeare Wallah as we imagined it. But it changed later on, became a different Shakespeare Wallah, but that's how we all started out. And we were all young and so hopeful and so happy and so excited to just get going, all of us together. It was a happy time.

**Kat Kinsman:**
It's an amazing thing when you're young and you're not afraid of failing at things in the same kind of way, that the same eyes aren't on you and you have room to mess up and try new things.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
Yeah, exactly. And I remember just had my 90th birthday, and my children put up photographs of me through the ages, as it were. And there's a very young photograph of me and Ismail Merchant, and we are bicycling in Central Park. It's such a lovely picture of the two of us, young, hopeful, ready to go.

**Kat Kinsman:**
I was rereading some of the opening to *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, And that is an intimidating thing to do, to sort of as a person who has learned to cook, from letters to decide, okay, I am going to make this this living document of Indian food and my particular version of Indian food.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
You see, I'll tell you something. I never thought of all that. Somebody just said, "Would you write a cookbook about Indian food?" I didn't know much. I know only the food of Delhi. I hadn't traveled through India. I was an ignoramus completely-

**Kat Kinsman:**
(laughs)

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
... but enthusiastic ignoramus. And so I sat down and wrote this book just as I would be talking to you, just telling you my story. This is what I cook, and this is how I imagined it happened. And I think if I was casting my imagination, it'd be David Niven going to India-

**Kat Kinsman:**
(laughs)

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
... and saying, "My good man, cook me up some Indian curry." So I just put it down as I was thinking about it, not with any thought of the future or the public reading it. I just put it down as I thought it should go in my mind, and there it was.

**Kat Kinsman:**
That's such an incredible thing, like that beauty and that freedom. Like, our restaurant editor, Khushbu Shah, is amazing and she's writing this book about aunties and Indian cooking. And she just knows that everybody's going to come in with their opinions about things. (laughs) So, when your book came out, what did you hear?
Madhur Jaffrey:
I never thought about that because I know the aunties would say, "Oh, this is no good at all. What did she do? She put so much turmeric, you can hardly eat it." We all criticize each other. But I never thought about that. I said, "This is what I want to write," and I tested it because I'm ignorant.

Kat Kinsman:
(laughs)

Madhur Jaffrey:
And I said, "I can't make any of these things except by learning. I must teach the way I learnt." So I explain everything. This is what I've done since the beginning, and I think that's why my books sell. That I explain, this is what it should look like. Cook it for about six minutes on a medium heat, and this is what should look slightly browned. So people know what they're aiming for and just as I would like to know what I'm aiming for, otherwise, I wouldn't be able to cook it. So I write like an ignoramus because I am one, and I tell people in detail. And I think that's why my books sell, because people can actually make the things and get it as close to what I want it. If I can do it, then they can do it. That's my feeling.

Kat Kinsman:
I feel like the word invitation was really key in there as well because it was for families like mine. My parents hadn't grown up eating anything outside of very colloquial, middle of the road postwar time American food. And so we didn't have any sort of metric for that. Once my dad bought your book, we started going around to restaurants and seeking it out. I wrote about this in Food & Wine a few months ago, where I was saying your boti kebabs recipes like that, they made us leave our house and the, and the stores we usually went to because in the, you know, 1970s and '80s and, or the Kentucky and Cincinnati, we had to go digging a little bit (laughs).

Madhur Jaffrey:
Where did you go there (laughs)?

Kat Kinsman:
(laughs)There were some Indian restaurants around that had little shops attached to them, and then this place opened up, Jungle Jim's. We had to drive maybe 45 minutes to get to and it was an international food importer, and they had everything that we were looking for and need. From all different cuisines around the world. And so we started just roaming the aisles and getting things. Clutching our copies of (laughs) your cookbook. It wasn't like we could take a picture with our phone or anything-

Madhur Jaffrey:
(laughs)
Kat Kinsman:
So scribbling down the list (laughs), but sometimes, bringing the books (laughs), to it. But what did you start hearing from people, once the book was out in the world?

Madhur Jaffrey:
Well, you know, the funny thing is I got a lot of letters and they were from either young Indians who didn't know how to cook and were following the book now, or they were from young Americans and Brits who had started cooking for the first time and said, "We didn't know we could make it at home." I remember I used to do my Cookery television show on one day, and the next day everybody was cooking that dish. And I remember a notice in the paper saying, "The green coriander has run out in Manchester," (laughs) Because I had cooked lemony chicken with green coriander the day before. And so, I think it became very popular in England, and it was cooked by a lot of young people who stayed faithful in the sense that they cooked it for their children, and their children cooked it for their children. And now it's gone into the next generation. So I've had letters from three generations of people who've eaten from my book, and sometimes they're in the same family.

Kat Kinsman:
I'd like to actually talk about you as a writer because part of this, yes, is the cooking and the interpretation of the recipes, but is also about the story around it and how you communicated all of this. And last year, republished a story that you wrote for Food & Wine, I believe in 1980 or 1981, which was right near the beginning of the magazine and the thing is with the, the writing of it is both instructional but also really incredibly evocative.

Madhur Jaffrey:
Right. I used to write for all the magazines. I wrote for every single magazine that I could write for, and they were not all food pieces. Like, I wrote for the Smithsonian. I wrote for Food & Wine, Travel + Leisure. I wrote for everything possible that I could write for.

Kat Kinsman:
How did you find your voice? Did you always know that you wanted to be a writer?

Madhur Jaffrey:
No. (laughs) I didn't know what I wanted to be.

Kat Kinsman:
(laughs)

Madhur Jaffrey:
I thought I was an actress. I came to America from England, having trained at RADA and could not get a single role. They didn't know from Indians. So I said, "You know, I can't just do nothing and play the odd ad in a hula-hula skirt or whatever." I couldn't do that. I mean, I did it, but I
said, "I can't live like that." So I said, "I must do something else." And I remember starting writing about food. The first magazine I wrote for was called Holiday magazine, and I wrote a piece on food and from then on I was just... people kept asking me. And then someone said, "Why don't you do a book?" And that particular person, I started putting a book together, but that person vanished from my life. And then I didn't know what to do with it, and my friend, Baidmeth, he was at The New Yorker. He suggested that I send the book to a friend of his at Pantheon. and then that person sent it to Judith, and Judith bought it overnight. And I wrote my first book for her.

Kat Kinsman:
Actually, this leads into the question, from Alex Reich., a friend of mine, who was saying that one of your daughters is apparently a regular at her restaurant. And she gets very excited every time she-

Madhur Jaffrey:
Oh, which restaurant?

Kat Kinsman:
Uh, Chiquito (laughs).

Madhur Jaffrey:
Oh, yes. I've been there.

Kat Kinsman:
Ooh, I know you have, because 'cause Alex has a question for you that she sent to me.

Madhur Jaffrey:
Oh, of course.

Kat Kinsman:
Because we were very much geeking out that I was going to get to (laughs) speak with you. She said, "I would sorta say I know she came with a different career in mind and knowing how often the food space adopts creatives, I think it's really interesting that instead of going to the performance of restaurants, it is interesting she chose the more home cooking as a domestic act. I would love to know how she sees that or she sees food and books as her business and brand in terms of identity and career."

Madhur Jaffrey:
I don't see anything in terms of my identity and career. This is the odd part. Those things don't make me. Something else makes me, and I don't know what that is. It's not what I do that makes me at all. It's what I am. And everybody can define that in any way they want. It has also to do with the way I love my kids and my grandkids and my parents. It has to do with all of us as
a family, and that's who I am. I'm part of this big family, Indian family from the north of India. And that's who I am. I don't think my work defines me.

**Kat Kinsman:**
I needed to hear that. I fall into that trap a lot. I don't know if this is specifically in how, a lot of women are raised, but it feels like we have to achieve certain things and have these markers of success and kind of prove our worth or, accomplish all of these things, when who you are in the universe is (laughs)..

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
It’s not your accomplishments. It's just who you are as a part of, I think, as a part of the family that you’re continuing to be a chain in.

**Kat Kinsman:**
Yeah. And how long did it take you to come to that?

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
Well, I think I came to it this second.

**Kat Kinsman:**
(laughs)

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
As you asked me, I began thinking about it.

**Kat Kinsman:**
It's a really, really interesting thing. I just turned 51, and I'm still trying to turn off the internal accountant every day like, "Did you achieve enough today?"

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
I'm a restless workaholic and want to be the best always in the sense that I'm a perfectionist. It's not that I want to be the best competitively, but I'm a perfectionist.

**Kat Kinsman:**
I love hearing and I often ask people, especially on this podcast, about how they feel about the word perfect, because it can be both something that is an inspiration to keep going or it could sort of be a trap because, oh I'm never gonna finish this thing because it's not perfect.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
It can be a trap, and I've seen it be a trap for other people. But I'm good about that in the sense that I say, "As perfect as I can make it." That's what I can do. I can't just go on rewriting and
rewriting because I like to keep my, I don't always do it, but if I have a date to hand in something, I try and hand it in.

**Kat Kinsman:**
I'm curious what you think Indian food is going through so much change in the US right now. And really, there are some absolute powerhouse people working on what it all means right now. How do you feel about what is going on in this evolution?

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
There are two things going on. One is people like Chintan Pandya and his gang or the Semma restaurant, all of this Dhamaka, all these places. They are saying, which we should've said long ago, "To hell with what you want. We're going to give you what we like and let's hope you like it too. We like it a lot." So that is a new attitude, confrontational slightly, but on the other hand, authentic and real. And I love them. I think they're doing a fantastic job, and I am so happy that they're there and they're still young and they can carry on with their work. But there is something else going on. I like Indian flavors. I want to mix them with my other flavors. So what we are creating, and magazines are doing a lot of this, they are putting together what I feel is clever, but undigested, untested aspects of different cuisines into one dish and experimenting with that. And everybody's sort of loving that. So everybody's experimenting, but the results of the experiments we may not know for another hundred years. So there is this hodgepodge of cooking that is what you see everywhere in every magazine. And I'm slightly questioning where this is all going.

**Kat Kinsman:**
I think that's very, very valid and we do a lot of examination of that ourselves. There is something we've been doing in the magazine for most of the year now. We kicked it off in our December/January issue where we're revisiting some of those recipes that made Food & Wine what we are. And, and your boti kebab (laughs) recipe was, was part of that. I always think of this, my background in fine art, and I always feel like you have to learn to paint the apple perfectly before you can go and abstract it.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
I mean I mix and match too in my own way. So at my birthday, the first course was like dosa I made, but in the north, we make them out of mung beans. And that's the only thing the children can't spread out on a skillet. They don't know how to do it yet. So I made the dosas. I made the mung bean dosas, but we fill them not with the dosa kind of filling but with a North Indian aloo gobi, which is potatoes and cauliflower cooked together, which is in one of my books. And I love aloo gobi. In fact, it was a dish that I got the recipe in England, and we went through all of England, say, just look for the best aloo gobi. And it turned out that one of the crew's mother made the best aloo gobi (laughs). So it's her recipe that's in the book, and that's the one I made.

**Kat Kinsman:**
So, what is it with the reissue of this book, and again, congratulations, a 50-year legacy of a cookbook. That's absolutely incredible. It's such an accomplishment. It's incredible. And what are you hoping people are going to find in this, either people who have loved it for a long time or people who are new to it?

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
Well, a lot of it is the food of Delhi, specifically. But there is food from other places as well. And it's my first excitement at the Indian food I grew up with, so that's what you're going to get in that book.

**Kat Kinsman:**
I love that. What is the thing you still want to achieve, that you're still chasing?

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
I think more acting of the best roles that are to come, but I don't know if I can do it. I'm getting perhaps too old and frail on my feet to do it. But if I get something absolutely marvelous, I would love to do it.

**Kat Kinsman:**
I'm just so grateful for this today, but also, like I said, sorry to be emotional about this, but you made my life deeper, more brilliant, brighter. And I'm one of millions, I feel incredibly lucky that I get to actually tell you that. And also, thank you from my dad.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
Oh, please thank him. I owe him. He taught you how to do this (laughs).

**Kat Kinsman:**
But please know that, you know, you affected his life and my sister and me. And, it was funny, my mom, she was not an especially adventurous eater or anything, so sometimes we would sort of tame things down (laughs).

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
(laughs)

**Kat Kinsman:**
Or just make them to her, her palate. Like I said, complicated relationship with Italian food and stuff like that, but we all appreciated it, so thank you.

**Madhur Jaffrey:**
Thank you.
Kat Kinsman:
Thank you so, so much for your time and everybody, please, if you don't already have this book in, in your life, and all of her books, please go out and find this now (laughs). And how would you like for people to find your work? Because there is so much of it out there.

Madhur Jaffrey:
Find what you can get. There's a lot available on YouTube. So wherever you can find it, do, and there are films to see everywhere,

Kat Kinsman:
(laughs) Well, thank you so, so much for your time.

Madhur Jaffrey:
Thank you. Thank you for talking to me and being so nice.

Music: Tinfoil Swans Theme Fades In

Kat Kinsman (VO)
Thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Madhur Jaffrey. Be sure to follow Tinfoil Swans on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen. And we’d love your feedback. If you could rate this podcast, leave us a review, we'd really appreciate it. I’d really appreciate it. You can also find us online at foodandwine.com/tinfoilswans. When I say hi, I mean our fantastic production team, Lottie Leymarie, Jennifer Del Sole, Michael Klasek, Amelia Schwartz, Ashley Day, Sean Flynn, and Hunter Lewis. Make sure to come back next week for a very special episode with my incredible colleague, Ray Isle. Take care of yourself until the next time.

Music: Tinfoil Swans Theme Fades Out