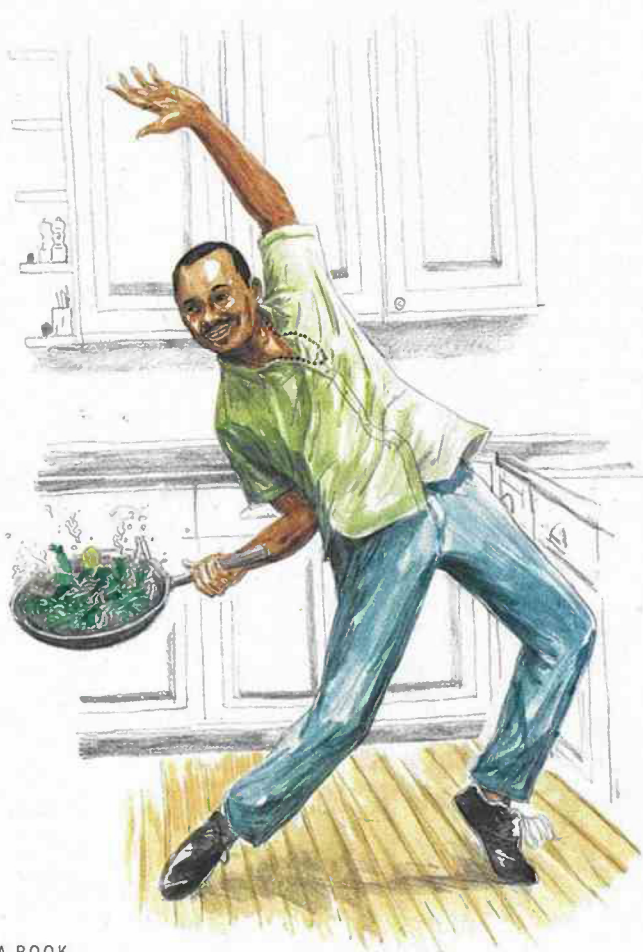




A COOK AND A BOOK

Step to It Alvin Ailey artistic director Robert Battle takes *Coconuts & Collards* by Von Diaz for a whirl.

“PRIDE MYSELF ON HAVING all the gadgets,” says Robert Battle, artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. At his house in Connecticut, they sit like sentinels against the backsplash on the large open kitchen’s counters. Outside on his deck, a state-of-the-art grill stands beside a spiffy electric pellet smoker. He’s got two deep fryers and the ever-popular Instant Pot; his cooking timer is Alexa, the Amazon smart-home device. But today, the only appliance the dancer and choreographer really needs is a food processor to blend a batch of adobo sauce.

Adobo features heavily in writer and radio producer Von Diaz’s new cookbook, *Coconuts & Collards*, which chronicles her early childhood in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico; her coming of age in Atlanta; and her recent reconnection to the island of her birth. The opening recipe is for sofrito, “the number one backbone of Puerto Rican cooking.” The next is for adobo, the marinade that “gives much Puerto Rican food its signature flavor,” with three variations: one for chicken and seafood, one for pork, and another for beef.

Battle is preparing the first of those adobos

for Diaz’s Sweet-and-Sour Chicken Adobo (p. 66), which gets its flavor, initially, from marinating in a mix of garlic, dried oregano, lemon juice, olive oil, salt, and pepper, then from roasting in a combination of brown sugar, vinegar, and chorizo. He’s incredulous that the entire cooking process takes place on the stove, that the bird is left whole, and that no more liquid goes into the pot. He is equally curious about the Coconut-Braised Collards recipe (p. 66), which begins with a sauté of scallions in a blend of butter and coconut oil. The greens join the allium for a few minutes before coconut milk and soy sauce are added. It’s the presence of coconut and lack of pork that are throwing Battle: “I’m from the traditional Southern collard greens, ham hock, apple cider vinegar—that flavor.” Still, he takes Diaz’s versions for a whirl.

Battle grew up in Florida. His earliest cooking memory is of watching chef Justin Wilson’s PBS television show about Cajun cuisine with his great-uncle in the 1970s. But it’s Emeril Lagasse, he says, “who really got me into cooking.” He found the Louisiana chef’s debut television series on the Food Network in the 1990s and nostalgically connected it to Wilson “in those overalls, [saying] all those crazy things.” He purchased Lagasse’s *Every Day’s a Party* and cooked through it until he felt like he could follow his own instincts.

Battle loves to read about different ways to make a dish when he’s on tour. “It’s a great way of letting go of everything: deciding what you’re going to make, which usually is happening on the plane,” he says. But at the stove, he prefers to improvise. “I’m just gonna make it up,” he confesses. Today is no exception. After he blends the marinade together, he decides it could use more olive oil and pours that in until the marinade reaches a consistency he likes. Once the chicken’s browned and left to continue cooking, he gathers and preps the necessary ingredients for the collards. In the ensuing downtime, he tells Alexa to “play upbeat jazz” for a dance break. “I tap-dance in the kitchen,” he says, his shoes clicking to the music.

The collards cook relatively quickly and with little effort; Battle sticks his fork in for a taste and his face lights up. “It’s just great!” he says, going in for another bite and giving



COCONUTS & COLLARDS

by Von Diaz,
\$28. University
Press of Florida

the pot a get-outta-here wave of the hand. A few minutes later, the chicken is done; he places it on a serving platter and carries it to his dining room table, which is fashioned from a salvaged bowling-alley lane.

The meal—and cookbook—has exceeded his expectations. He relates to Diaz's economy of ingredients. "That's so much of what we try to do in composing a dance," he says. "Find ingredients that really matter, and then figure out a way to present them." He also admires her creativity, what he refers to as "cultural collision." Most of all, Diaz's point of view resonates. "There was a certain warmth in there that was embracing the tradition," he notes, but it also was about her own spin on that heritage. "It was about a culinary journey that was also a personal one."

As dinner winds down, Battle decides to invite Diaz to one of the performances in Alvin Ailey's 60th anniversary program, which kicks off this fall at Lincoln Center. Then he starts to think about what he'll cook tomorrow: perhaps pork ribs in a guava-rich sauce, or Costillas de Cerde con Salsa BBQ de Guayaba, as you'll find it in *Coconuts & Collards*.

Coconut-Braised Collards

TOTAL 15 MIN; SERVES 4

Coconut milk sweetens and enriches collard greens in this quick-cooking dish from Von Diaz's Coconuts & Collards.

- 1 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 Tbsp. coconut oil
- 1 bunch scallions (about 5 oz.), thinly sliced
- 1 large bunch collards (about 2 lb.), leaves and tender stems chopped
- 1½ cups canned coconut milk, well shaken
- 1 Tbsp. soy sauce
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper

1. Melt butter and coconut oil in a large wok or skillet over medium-high. Add scallions, and cook, stirring often, 1 minute. Add collards in 2 batches, stirring first batch until wilted, about 1 minute, before adding second batch.
2. Add coconut milk and soy sauce to wok; bring to a simmer. Reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer, uncovered, stirring often, until collards are just tender, 7 to 10 minutes. Stir in salt and pepper.

Sweet-and-Sour Chicken Adobo

ACTIVE 25 MIN; TOTAL 1 HR 35 MIN; SERVES 4

Diaz's surprising method of searing then steaming a whole chicken in a sweet vinegar mixture on the stove yields tender meat and a luscious pan sauce.

- 3 Tbsp. minced garlic (about 12 garlic cloves)
- 2 Tbsp. dried oregano
- 1 Tbsp. kosher salt
- 1 Tbsp. black pepper
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice (from 2 lemons)
- 1 (3- to 4-lb.) whole chicken
- 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 6 oz. Spanish chorizo
- ⅓ cup packed light brown sugar
- ¼ cup red wine vinegar

1. Pulse garlic, oregano, salt, and pepper in a mini food processor until finely chopped. Add oil and lemon juice; process until smooth.
2. Place chicken and garlic mixture in a large ziplock plastic bag. Seal bag, and let stand 30 minutes at room temperature or up to 8 hours in refrigerator. Remove chicken from marinade, letting excess drip off. Discard marinade.
3. Melt butter in a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan or Dutch oven over medium-high. Add chicken, breast side down, and sear until just

browned, 3 to 5 minutes. Flip chicken, and sear until browned, 3 to 5 minutes.

4. Using tongs, transfer chicken to a plate. Reduce heat to medium, and add chorizo, brown sugar, and vinegar to pan. Cook, stirring often, until brown sugar is melted, 3 to 5 minutes.

5. Arrange chorizo mixture around edges of pan, and return chicken to pan, breast side down. Cover, reduce heat to low, and cook until evenly browned, about 30 minutes. Flip chicken, cover, and cook until a meat thermometer registers 185°F when inserted in thickest portion of thigh and 165°F in thickest portion of breast, about 30 minutes.

6. Transfer chicken to a cutting board; let rest 5 minutes. Pour any accumulated juices from cutting board into remaining chorizo mixture in pan. Remove chorizo, and thinly slice. Pour sauce mixture through a fine wire-mesh strainer into a serving bowl; discard solids. Carve chicken, and serve with sauce and sliced chorizo.

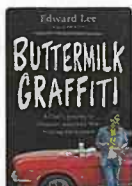
WINE PAIRING

Rich German Pinot Blanc: 2016 Koehler-Ruprecht Weissburgunder Kabinett Trocken

F&W Recommends This summer, cook through three more staff-favorite Southern books.



Soul, Todd Richards' first cookbook, is an homage to and reinterpretation of Southern cuisine, featuring collards in ham-hock ramen, turkey legs in strawberry barbecue sauce, and Meyer lemon-glazed fried blueberry pies.



Edward Lee spent two years traveling the U.S. researching **Buttermilk Graffiti**, a chef's travel journal with recipes like Cambodian curried fish and Peruvian grilled chicken that capture what the nation's melting-pot cuisine is today.



Shrimp and grits in a jalapeño-tomato puree, fried green tomatillos, tequila sweet tea: Chef Eddie Hernandez's first book, **Turnip Greens & Tortillas**, is a delicious mash-up of Mexican, Cajun, and Southern fare. —KAREN SHIMIZU