



# Cooking with *Jet Fuel*

## Celebrity Chef Jet Tila *continues to go at full speed*

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*Written by Rich Manning  
Photography courtesy of Jet Tila*



**Jet Tila wasn't born with an off-switch.** Either that, or it's broken, and he has no intention of getting it fixed. He and his wife are working on another cookbook, a follow-up to 2017's critically acclaimed "101 Asian Dishes You Need to Cook Before You Die." He's on "Iron Chef," riffing with host Alton Brown and providing the play-by-play from Kitchen Stadium's hallowed floor. He's doing culinary work for NBC Universal. He still somehow has time to handle what he calls "other bits and bobs of the team Tila universe."

This is what it looks like when the lines separating success and passion are erased. The "Iron Chef" gig affords us the opportunity to watch this unfettered drive in action, particularly since he and Brown work so well together — a rapport he confirms as genuine. His published and yet-to-be-published cookbooks aim to impart this feeling to home cooks, who can find their own success replicating the cuisine that fanned Tila's culinary fire.

While the release date for his new cookbook has yet to be announced, his critically acclaimed "101 Asian Dishes" provides insight to his ardor because it's not just a cookbook. It's a printed study of Asian cuisine, spread across various nations, and parsed for maximum



approachability. To us, it's also a gadget — a tool we use while cooking in the kitchen. Tila says he wrote the cookbook to fill a gaping hole: “I found that it was hard to find a cookbook that had more than a few Asian recipes somebody wanted to cook,” he says. “I wanted to put all of those favorite Asian recipes in one place. Basically, I want it to be the cookbook that never really leaves the kitchen. With it, you can make 101 dishes that will appeal to just about anyone.”

Tila is aware his celebrity may drive some of his cookbook's sales. He seems comfortable with this — when I talk to him, he mentions the allure of the cookbook as a coffee-table tome or decorative touch a couple of times. Even as he acknowledges his book's aesthetic potential, he hesitates to call it art. “I am a teacher, culinary historian, and a storyteller,” he states. “I teach people how to combine flavors and techniques to create dishes that they will hopefully enjoy eating. I try to pass on recipes and stories that have been around for hundreds of years. To me, calling this art seems very self-serving. If I can teach someone to create a dish that makes them happy, then I've done my job.”

Part of his teaching role stems from demystifying the concept of Asian cuisines and their numerous offshoots. “101 Asian Dishes” contains an all-star list of national

epicurean treasures for the home cook to create and enjoy: Vietnamese beef pho; Korean BBQ short ribs; Thai Panang beef curry; Japanese miso roasted black cod. While the finished products celebrate each country's unique flavor profile, the recipes' gadget-like tendencies reverse engineer the dish's nationalistic tendencies to reveal strikingly similar DNA. Demonstrating this was an essential part of Tila's process. “It's important for me to teach cooks how Asian chefs think,” he explains. “Each Asian country cooks within five flavors, but each one represents them in their own way.”

The parsing of a global region's cuisine, as Tila's book does, affirms a cookbook's status as the kitchen's mother gadget, a device that compartmentalizes dishes into elements that the home cook can create by grabbing appliances, raiding the spice rack and breaking out the measuring cups. Tila also hopes his cookbooks can inspire people to get comfortable with the kitchen's more esoteric gizmos, including items that may not be part of their culinary consciousness yet. “I definitely want cooks to explore new gadgets like mortar and pestles, steamers, cleavers and other tools that Asian cooks use on a daily basis,” he notes. “These shouldn't necessarily be considered forgotten gadgets, because most American cooks didn't grow up with them. I think they're gadgets to be discovered.”

Wise words from a man who may have yet to discover his off-switch.





## Spicy Basil Beef (Pad Krapow)

### You'll Need:

- 3 tbs. sweet soy sauce
- 2 tbs. oyster sauce
- 4 tbs. fish sauce
- 2 tbs. chili paste in soybean oil
- 3 tbs. vegetable oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1-3 serrano or Thai chilies, sliced
- 3 cups lean ground beef
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 1 small red bell pepper, sliced
- 1½ cups Thai basil leaves, picked off the stem
- ½ tsp. white pepper

### Directions:

Combine the sweet soy sauce, oyster sauce, fish sauce and chili paste in a small bowl and reserve.

Heat your wok or large skillet over high heat and add the vegetable oil. When wisps of white smoke appear, add the garlic and chilies. Cook them until the garlic starts to brown, about 30 seconds.

Stir in the ground beef, flatten against the pan and cook undisturbed for about 45 seconds. The beef will start to brown; turn over once, press flat against the pan and cook for another 30 seconds. Break up the meat into gravel-sized pieces and drain any excess liquid.

Stir in the onion and bell pepper, and stir-fry for about 1 minute. Add the reserved sauce to the wok and combine the ingredients thoroughly for about 1 minute. Add the Thai basil and cook until the beef is thoroughly cooked and onions are slightly tender. Finish with white pepper.

**Chef's Tip:** Substitute any meat or seafood in this dish, which is common in Thailand. Ground chicken or pork are amazing. Top with a runny fried egg or two, and serve over jasmine rice for a perfect meal.

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