

# Andrew Zimmern

Although best known as the affable host of the Travel Channel's *Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern* (and its various spin-offs), the 53-year-old Minneapolis-based chef is also a dedicated philanthropist, educator, and activist familiar to fans in 70 countries. **Culture** caught up with him between cooking demos at the FOOD & WINE Classic in Aspen to get the lowdown on what he's learned from his adventures trawling back alleys and kitchens around the world, and why he thinks goat is great.

INTERVIEWED BY LAUREL MILLER

## ON FAME:

*I'm extremely distressed when I see people not using their success to create positive change.*

## ON GOAT MEAT:

I'm on board with goat in a lot of ways: cheese, milk, meat. It's like soccer in America. We say we like it and understand it, but not really. I feel it represents the kind of changes necessary in our food system; it's not raised under industrial conditions and supporting the type of agriculture that's destroying the land. Being smart eaters means diversifying our food choices.

## ON GETTING INTO FOOD:

*My mother went to Mills College [in Oakland, Calif.] and roomed with Trader Vic's daughter. She got cooking lessons from Vic Bergeron himself. We were the only apartment building in my neighborhood [in Long Island] where there was a white Jewish lady cooking stir-fry.*

## ON OVERCOMING ADDICTION:

I have a horrible disease, called "more." I've been sober for 22 years (I was addicted to drugs and alcohol), but my real problem is *more*. At my lowest point, I was a homeless petty thief living on the streets. I created a TV show [Bizarre Foods] about tolerance, acceptance, and understanding, because my recovery was all about that. In my opinion, life should be lived in the service of other people, and I'm driven to act on that philosophy, constantly.

## ON TELEVISION:

The development of the show was very intentional and calculated, to feature food from the fringes of society. Some see it as "fat white guy travels the world and eats bugs." But others get that it's a way to experience other cultures, through food.

## ON CHEESE:

*I love a good, stinky cheese.*

*Cheese is an experience in controlled spoilage. One of the most memorable visits I had was with a wild goat herder in Sardinia. He aged his cheeses in their cleaned stomachs, and turned it into such a strong, ammoniated, throat-burning product. He also made casu marzu [a cheese made with live maggots].*

*We [wife Rishia and son Noah] always have three cheeses in the house; I like to purchase it cut to order. I really enjoy English Tunworth Camembert, and clothbound cheddar from Scotland. ...I try to smuggle a lot of cheese [back home] when I'm traveling in Europe.*



PHOTO: Courtesy of Andrew Zimmer