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## rao's on the grill

*Perfectly Simple Italian Recipes from My Family to Yours*  
Frank Pellegrino, Jr.



## FRANK PELLEGRINO, JR. RAO'S CO-OWNER

When asked about his title, Frank Pellegrino, Jr., among the fourth generation of the legendary New York restaurant family, founders of Rao's, jokes that he is "the head busboy because my work hasn't really changed that much in 30 years."

His self-deprecating wit is charming as well as hugely understated as Pellegrino has managed Rao's at Caesars Palace since 2006 and just spent the last seven months working on his soon-to-be-released cookbook, "Rao's on the Grill."

For certain, both endeavors are a labor of love for Pellegrino, who adds, "food is a big part of my life. For Italians food is going from the minute we wake up till we go to bed." Adding that "cooking and dining alfresco is a way of life with me, and I have an outdoor kitchen setup that I use as much as possible," Pellegrino's cookbook is out this month from St. Martin's Press.

"Rao's on the Grill" not only offers the expected with sections on beef, pork, veal, chicken and seafood, the cookbook also offers recipes for grilling pizza, pasta, and even desserts. "The cookbook shows you how to use your grill to its fullest to create many of Rao's signature dishes but with the added 'kiss of the grill' added to their already delicious flavor profiles," explains the author.

### *Why did you decide to do "Rao's on the Grill"?*

Believe it not, it's been brewing for quite some time. I will never forget with I got my first MAC, basically it allowed you to do anything. It just took 20 years to manifest itself. Once I started executing dishes, it was interesting how many translated incredibly well on the grill. I noticed that most of the recipes people requested, I could do on the grill.

### *How did you go about selecting the recipes?*

Many signature recipes on the Rao's menu made it into the cookbook, including our famous Grilled Lemon Chicken, Grilled Veal Chops and Grilled Chicken Scarpariello. A couple of the recipes I included were created on the fly but they all embody the spirit of Rao's cooking. If you give me a fire, ingredients and a pan to cook it on, I will make you good, fun food.

### *What's your go-to recipe for the grill when you are cooking at home?*

I stick to plain old grilled stuff like sea bass, chicken, pork chops. And I leave myself open to use whatever I might find in my refrigerator.

### *There's a number of dessert recipes in the cookbook, have you tried them all?*

I had help from Rao's pastry chef Laura Augsburger but, yes, I have tried all of them and I love them all. The S'Mores Bread Puddings, Candy Bar Banana Splits, Pineapple Upside-Down Cake, and Grilled Fruit Kebabs are off the hook. They are all fun, and relatively easy to do.

When we started collaborating on the dessert recipes, I was trying to recreate that experience of being a kid in a candy store and discovering a candy for the first time. Chef Laura used her childhood camping experiences to inspire the desserts. Her camping experiences will now become part of thousands of people's lives.

### *You even grill pizzas...*

The kick starter for this one was my youngest daughter would be playing outside by the pool and I used to cook frozen pizzas on the grill. Then I decided to try doing pizzas from scratch. I just use a perforated pan and it only takes 10 to 12 minutes depending on altitude.

### *What food stuff are you currently obsessed with at the moment?*

Sweets, I have been dreaming about sweets a lot lately, which is odd because I don't have a sweet tooth. But we are working on some new dessert stuff here at the restaurant so that probably explains it. Also, cherry tomatoes; my dad is just back from Italy and he brought some with him so there's a dynamic of them we are trying to incorporate in some dishes.

### *What's your favorite late-night snack?*

Fruit, either an apple or pear. And maybe an occasional ½ pint of ice cream. □