

# Island Inspired: A Taste of Puerto Rico

Chef Eric Ripert and designer Matthew Patrick Smyth transform colorful memories—and tropical details—into an unforgettable experience back in New York.



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“What triggers creativity for me are experiences from the past or present.”

—ERIC RIPERT

It’s an occasion that has been decades in the making—based on years of travels to Puerto Rico and a love for the sights, sounds, traditions and uniquely vibrant essence that has defined each visit. Renowned Chef Eric Ripert and celebrated designer Matthew Patrick Smyth, who have both traveled extensively to Puerto Rico, set out to create an experience informed by their favorite details and memories.

On the New York-based set of Eric’s award-winning show *Avec Eric*, they create a dinner and a setting filled with tropical touches reminiscent of the island’s culture, traditions and sensory details. Eric celebrates the rich Spanish and African-influenced culinary heritage with red snapper in a vibrant sauce flavored by fresh coconut milk and lime. Sofrito, a mix of onion, garlic, cilantro and peppers, is the base of the sauce, and is “one of the pillars of cooking in Puerto Rico,” he says. He also adds achiote for spice.

Eric notes, “What triggers creativity for me are experiences, from the past or present. I store bits of information from the location,

the season, the produce, memories, music. When I think about a dish, all those experiences come together.” He is also inspired by the exuberant yet earthy details Matthew adds to the set.

Matthew brings a Caribbean spirit to the table and the kitchen itself. The details he chooses—a blend of brightly colored pottery, rustic, carved wooden objects, antique statues, tropical flowers and table linens, and a small, beaded *coquí* frog—are “very much in the spirit of Puerto Rico.” He adds, “One of the first things you notice when you get to Old San Juan is the color of the buildings, the architecture. It’s all brightly painted in different colors.”

On the elements he selects, Matthew notes, “I try to sum up what it is about a place that strikes me. I think, what’s my best memory of the place? Which details come to mind automatically?” Like Eric, he then interprets those memories into something not simply shaped by a place and time, but also uniquely its own. In this New York kitchen the details, and all they inspire, create an unforgettable experience.



Avocado, a hint of lime and a sauce with fresh coconut milk add tropical essence to the red snapper.



Eric appreciates the Jenn-Air® induction cooktop, which features precise temperature control.



A mix of bright ceramics and antique wooden objects captures the spirit of the island.



Brightly colored table accents invoke the vibrant Caribbean feel of Puerto Rico.



Matthew and Eric get ready to enjoy a feast for the senses.