



BrazingBeauty

Supermodel Rachel Hunter opens up her Hermosa Beach home for some New Zealand-style hospitality

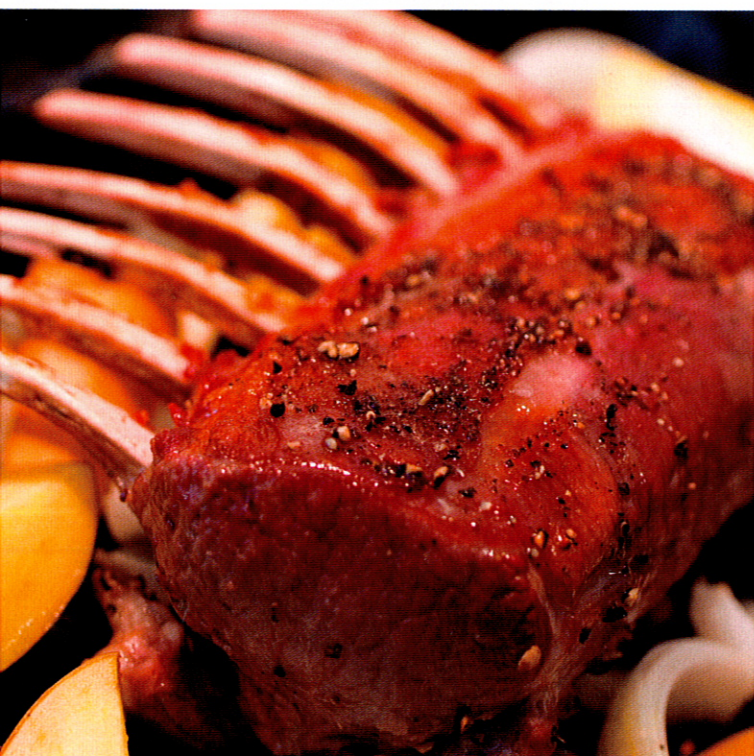
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I've always found the intros common to glossy celebrity journalism a bit cheesy. You know the ones I'm talking about. The profiles that invariably begin with a detailed description of how the actress, model or singer arrives at the door barefoot, make-up free and practically wearing pajamas as she welcomes the writer into her home.

Well, Rachel Hunter doesn't greet me at the door of her new Hermosa Beach home. Her cabinetmaker does. And one by one, her four dogs and then her kids' nanny, JoJo. When I do spy Rachel whirling amidst the mayhem, she's working with her construction crew to decide on the final touches of her freshly remodeled kitchen. The dilemma? Whether or not to enclose her new DCS by Fisher & Paykel 48-inch Professional Wall Mount Ventilation Hood in the same handmade, tongue-and-groove cabinetry that encircles her self-described Cape Cod/country-themed kitchen. She and designer Baron Rogers opt to forgo the skirt and have the crew carry only the cabinet's trim across the ceiling. The result is satisfying, the beautiful stainless hood harmonizing perfectly with Rachel's all-business DCS by Fisher & Paykel 48-inch Professional 6-burner Dual Fuel Range with integral griddle.

Oh, did I mention the supermodel is barefoot, make-up free and practically wearing pajamas? Even more endearing, she stays this way during my entire visit, radiating pleasantness, enduring doggy kisses from her cuddly canines and busting out with the occasional "Mmm, everything smells so good!"



We're here with a wagon-full of goodies. Celebrity chef Tim Creehan has come to show the New Zealand-born supermodel the particulars of preparing one of her country's most sought-after staples, New Zealand lamb, which will be accompanied by an array of vegetables and chased with a very decadent flourless chocolate cake. Like oil and water tides, bags and boxes of food trade counter space with carpentry tools. Rachel is oblivious to the chaos, bustling around the kitchen and explaining in her silky Kiwi accent how she changed the layout of the space when she bought the house. "It really isn't a chef's kitchen," she says of the open, airy-feeling space with windows that face the Pacific. "But then I'm not a chef, so I guess it doesn't matter."

Rachel replaced the kitchen's center island with a massive teak table, which is ringed by chairs upholstered in white linen and lit by an enormous shabby-chic chandelier. This setup does limit prep space and splits the range from the sinks, but for Rachel and her daughter, Renée, 15, and son, Liam, 13 (with ex-husband Rod Stewart), the centralized table provides a much-valued hangout. "I wanted something intimate," she says, perching on a stepstool to wipe fingerprints from her stainless hood, "a place where we could eat together, but also just sit around and talk or do homework."

When Tim queries about tableware, Rachel says dryly, "Oh sorry, we don't have any real plates here, we only use paper plates and plastic utensils." And so the quips will roll, each giving us pause until we grow accustomed to the gorgeous model's artful ribbing. Rachel started modeling when she was 17, and by age 20 had become a *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue favorite. Since those days her image has graced countless magazine covers, from *Cosmopolitan* to *Playboy*. Rachel has also experimented with acting ("A Walk in the Park" and "The Benchwarmers"). For kicks, she even played the title role in the Fountains of Wayne music video "Stacy's Mom [Has Got it Going On]." She's also taken a turn as a television host ("Make Me a Supermodel") and been a contestant on "Dancing with the Stars." Even though her career is still sizzling, Rachel is primarily focused on her kids, and supporting their happiness is the reason she's just purchased and remodeled this homey Hermosa Beach pad.

"I wanted a place that was more laid back," she says of the area, "and the kids wanted to be closer to what they enjoy—hanging out at the beach, skateboarding." Hermosa is the word for "beautiful" in Spanish, and the clear, dolphin-rich waters and clean sandy beach justify its name. "This house is our 'beach house.' We'll have eight or 10 kids here every day during the summer."

As Tim preps the meal, Rachel is brimming with cooking questions. She wants to know more about the crystals of Himalayan Pink Salt he's grating. "It comes from a primordial sea," Tim explains, "and is hand-mined, so it's very pure." We laugh when he admits it's not actually better than regular sea salt for cooking, it's just super cool. (Of course, any organic salt is better for you than



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the processed table variety.) Tim shows Rachel some tricks for trimming the fat from the New Zealand lamb he's brought. This delicate meat is no longer difficult to find at organic markets in the U.S., but it's still very expensive. What you get is far leaner than our domestic lamb and "has a bit of a wild flavor," adds Rachel, who grew up eating the local chops in Auckland.

"My mother was a terrible cook," she laughs as she tucks the lamb and vegetables into her range's conveniently small secondary oven. "She cooked organic, because that's normal in New Zealand, but she burned everything." It's probably a good thing she wasn't in command of Rachel's 9,000 watts of oven heat back then, but the Dual-Flow burners, with their consistent low-simmering technology, might have saved a few meals. "Me, I have hit-or-miss things." Rachel loves Tim's approach to dishes like this lightly herbed lamb. Nothing too complicated, just enough seasoning to enhance the inherent taste of the food. "He makes it look so easy," she says, "simple, instead of chaotic."

Rachel is unabashedly excited by her new range, and in uncharacteristic-for-a-supermodel style, she's especially inspired by Tim's flourless chocolate cake. "It's incredibly simple," he says of the recipe. "Just remember the number eight: eight ounces of butter, chocolate and sugar, plus eight eggs." As Rachel melts the chocolate on the stove, Tim explains how it's nearly impossible to simmer chocolate on any competing setup, simply because no other range can offer DCS's patented 140-degree temperature control. "You need absolute consistency," he says. "You'll scald the chocolate at any temperature above 140...even a single flare-up can affect the taste." Rachel adds a bowlful of butter, her humongous blue eyes rolling.

The cake is a masterpiece of simplicity, and so seem Rachel's requirements for happiness. The little house in Hermosa is every bit a home, especially now that the construction crew has fled and scents of herbed lamb and chocolate cake fill the air. "The range is fantastic," she beams. When her kids arrive home from school she still hasn't put shoes on, and I don't blame her. If I lived in this comfy home with dogs in every corner and windows open to the sea, I'd never want to put mine on either. **1**

Chocolate Sin Cake with fresh fruit

8 ounces semi-sweet chocolate
8 ounces unsalted butter
8 ounces sugar
8 eggs
powdered sugar, raspberries
and kiwis as garnish

Preheat oven to 350°F. Butter the bottom of a 10-inch round cake pan and line the bottom of the pan with wax paper. Combine chocolate and butter. Melt the butter and chocolate completely over a double boiler and let cool. Whip the eggs and sugar together until foamy. Combine the two mixtures together and blend thoroughly. Pour the sin cake mixture into the cake pan and place the cake pan in a baking pan with at least 1 1/2 inches of water. Bake for 45 minutes. Turn off the oven and allow the cake to cool in the oven. Refrigerate the cake for two hours before removing from the pan. Garnish with powdered sugar, raspberries and sliced kiwis.

