

QUARANTINING with MARTHA

On the eve of the release of her 97th book, America's favorite lifestyle guru talks about thriving in isolation and why there's never been a better time to bake a cake.

BY ALISON ASHTON

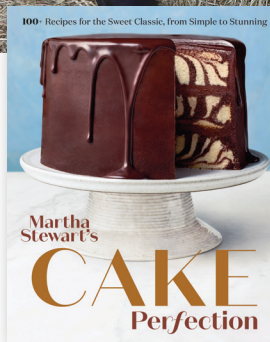
"You know Antoni [Porowski] from *Queer Eye*?" Martha Stewart asks, referring to the food expert on the popular Netflix show. She's chatting with *Parade* by Zoom from the wood-paneled library at Skylands, her estate in Maine, where she's vacationing with her daughter, Alexis, and grandchildren. Porowski and a mutual friend had come for a socially distanced dinner the night before and ended up staying a couple of days, so he'd made breakfast that morning.

"He said the best thing he cooks is scrambled eggs, so the children challenged him," she recounts. "They're 8 and 9. They gave him a 7.5 on his eggs and he was devastated."

It's no surprise that Stewart's grandchildren would have high standards, but it was all in good fun. Porowski documented his effort on Instagram, with Stewart kibitzing in the background, and the kids were taking him on a tour of "Camp" Skylands while we talked.

That's the Martha Stewart fans love. On the one hand, her life in our "new normal" has been much like everyone's—spending more time at home than ever before, navigating the challenges of remote work and enjoying a lay-low staycation with family and friends. On the other hand, Stewart, 79, does it with more style and with much more glamorous friends and surroundings. Like her magazine, *Martha Stewart Living*, and her dozens of books and TV shows, Stewart's quarantine life is decidedly aspirational. But she's not glib about this unprecedented challenging year we're all sharing. "I'm in this kind of horror," she says at one point, grimacing. "But we have to look for good things."

For all its craziness, 2020 has shaped up to be a very interesting year for Stewart—in a good way. In a bit of fortuitous timing, her latest book, *Martha Stewart's Cake Perfection*, is out this week. "People



are baking cakes and eating more than they've ever eaten before," she says. "I think most people have gained weight."

Not her, though. "I've actually *lost* 16 pounds," she says. "I think it's because I don't go out to dinner and I'm eating straight from my garden. I'm a very healthy eater to start with. I've had meat maybe 10 times in the last six months."

ISOLATING IN STYLE

When things shut down in New York City in March, Stewart retreated to her 153-acre Bedford, N.Y., farm

Stewart with her dogs, Crème Brûlée, Bête Noire, Emperor Han and Empress Qin

(one of her four homes) along with her driver, housekeeper and gardener, who she cheekily refers to as her "detainees." "I got in a lot of trouble for calling them detainees," she says, chuckling. "They love being called detainees, so don't feel bad if you use that word." (When she posted about them on Instagram, fans promptly volunteered for detention.) "They were not allowed to go home. They had to stay safe," she says. "We were really careful." After working six to seven days a week helping her

maintain the farm and care for her menagerie of pets and livestock, her employees enjoy a Martha-cooked dinner every night.

"I lost count at 129 dinners," she says.

Stewart is famously productive, and life in quarantine has been no different. "I've done so many projects at the farm, all the things I just kind of put off because I worked so hard at the office," she says. "I redecorated my entire house!"

Like many suddenly living and working at home 24/7, she realized the house needed a refresh. "I live in a farmhouse," she says. "It has a couple large rooms, but it's a smallish house.

I have beautiful furniture and accessories, but there was no place for anybody to really sit down and talk." She was in the habit of eating most of her meals and working perched on a stool at her kitchen counter—fine once in a while, but hardly a comfortable or efficient way to run her empire remotely.

So she tapped the expertise of her long-time colleague Kevin Sharkey, executive director of design for Martha Stewart Home Divisions. Together, they went through the house, rearranging furniture and repurposing rooms. Her glassed-in porch became her

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PISTACHIO-CARDAMOM BUNDT

Pistachios, rose water and dried rose petals—all items you can order online if not available in the international aisle at your supermarket—lend this buttermilk Bundt cake delicious Middle Eastern flavors. Sicilian pistachios are prized for their rich, sweet flavor and distinctive emerald green and purple hue, but you also can use regular pistachios.

Arrange rack in middle of oven. Preheat oven to 350°F. Using a pastry brush, butter a 12-cup Bundt pan; dust with unbleached **all-purpose flour**, tapping out any excess.

In a food processor, pulse 1 cup **shelled unsalted pistachios** (preferably Sicilian) until finely ground. In a medium bowl, whisk together ground pistachios, 2¼ cups flour, 1 tsp **kosher salt**, 1 tsp **baking powder**, ½ tsp **baking soda** and ½ tsp **ground cardamom**.

With an electric mixer, beat 2 sticks (1 cup) **unsalted butter**, at room temperature, and 1½ cups **granulated sugar** on medium-high until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Add 4 **large eggs** (at room temperature), 1 at a time, beating well after each addi-

tion. Reduce speed to low; add flour mixture in 2 batches, alternating with 1 cup **buttermilk** (at room temperature). Pour batter into prepared

pan. Bake 45–50 minutes or until cake springs back to touch and a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Transfer pan to a wire rack set over a baking sheet or a piece of parchment paper; cool 30 minutes. Turn out cake onto rack; cool completely.

In a medium bowl, sift 2 cups **confectioners' sugar**. Whisk in 2–3 Tbsp **milk** and ¼ tsp **rose water** until smooth. (For more opaque glaze, use less milk; for thinner glaze, use a bit more.) Transfer glaze to a measuring cup; pour over top of cake in a circular motion. Sprinkle with ¼ cup finely chopped pistachios and 3 Tbsp **dried organic rose petals**. Let set 30 minutes. **Serves 10–14.**



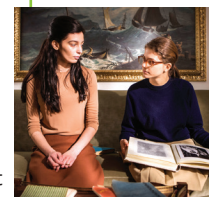
"The trickiest part of any Bundt is getting it out of the pan in one piece—so butter generously then sprinkle with flour," says Stewart.

MARTHA'S QUARANTINE SURVIVAL GUIDE



Sanity saver "I'm outdoors every single day, rain or shine. That fresh air is terribly important to me," says Stewart.

Animal planet "I realize more how much I enjoy my animals. I have a lot of livestock on my farm, and I've only added to it." At last count, she has four dogs, two cats and two dozen canaries, plus chickens, horses, donkeys, a pony and peafowl.



TV binge "There's so much to do that I don't sit around watching TV," Stewart

says. But she did binge the HBO series *My Brilliant Friend*, based on Elena Ferrante's novel. "It's all in Italian, so it's kind of fun. She's a very good writer—like the new intelligent romantic writer."

What she misses most "I love to travel. I had a lot of travel plans this summer for business. All of that, of course, had to be postponed. I miss seeing friends from different parts of the country."



Next big trip Stewart travels a lot with her grandchildren, and so far they've visited six continents. "They announced last night they want to go to the seventh, so our first

big family trip [post-pandemic] is going to be to Antarctica."

She wishes more people would... Cook for her. "I must say that I've had a lot of people for dinner here up in Maine, but I've only gone to one dinner party so far. That makes me a little sad."

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office. “I can see my canaries,” she says, beaming. “I have a huge computer and a real desk surface on which to write! I have a nice chair and lots of plants.” Other than reupholstering a few pieces of furniture with fabric she had stashed in the attic and replacing some worn-out sisal

that you don’t have to throw everything away and get all new stuff.” And the current quarantine-driven interest in home improvement projects big and small—Stewart’s sweet spot—has been great for business. She has a furniture collection with Wayfair that is inspired by

her homes, a branded store on Amazon, a line with QVC and a longtime partnership with Macy’s (including new bakeware tied to *Cake Perfection*).

On another front, recent family sushi and Mexican food nights at home will likely inspire new global offerings for her Martha & Marley Spoon meal-kit delivery partnership. It’s also



Stewart works from her Bedford, N.Y., porch.

going gangbusters in an era when consumers want to minimize trips to the supermarket and take the drudgery out of cooking dinner every night.

And most notably, her quarantine gardening projects sparked a whole new show—*Martha Knows Best*—in which she remotely counsels horticulturally challenged regular folks and

ART IMITATING LIFE

For decades, what’s happening in Stewart’s life becomes the rich fodder for other projects. The Bedford redo will be an upcoming feature in *Martha Stewart Living*: “I know that it would make other people happy to know

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BAKED APPLES AND CREAM CHEESE FROSTING MAKE STEWART’S APPLE LAYER CAKE A SEASONAL FAVORITE

Go to [Parade.com/applecake](https://www.parade.com/applecake) for the recipe.

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celebrity pals (among them Snoop Dogg, Porowski, Lupita Nyong'o, Richard Gere and Jay Leno). Stewart churned out the show, co-starring detainee-sidekick gardener Ryan McCallister, over two very hot weeks in mid-June before it premiered on HGTV at the end of July. She hopes to do another season.



Stewart connects with her friend, rapper Snoop Dogg, on an episode of *Martha Knows Best*.

Of course, Stewart pioneered that kind of art-imitating-life multichannel brand ecosystem of books, magazines, television shows, merchandising partnerships and e-commerce—all seamlessly feeding each other and anchored in her passions. It's a blueprint many—from every wannabe Instafluencer to celebrity heavy hitters like Gwyneth Paltrow and Chrissy Teigen—have sought to replicate but none have surpassed.

Imitators don't worry her. There's room for anyone doing their thing, she says, whatever it is, as long as they do it well. "There are how many billions of people in the world? There are plenty of people to serve with good ideas and good information and beautiful products," Stewart says. "Good luck to all of us who are trying to improve the lifestyles of everybody."

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MARTHA IN PICTURES

Stewart's personal Instagram account, @marthastewart48, offers a peek at a more casual Martha, including a tutorial to make her famous "Martha-ritas," homemade dinner with her fellow "detainees" and a sultry selfie posted from her pool in East Hampton on the eve of her 79th birthday. "I was trying to take a picture of a beautiful plant in a pot at the end of the pool and my camera was on reverse," says Stewart. "I was in selfie mode and I looked up and I looked nice. The light was so perfect, and I thought, *Oh, this is pretty good.* I posted it and the rest is, you know, viral!"



Visit [Parade.com/martha](https://www.parade.com/martha) for more of Stewart's best Instagram posts during quarantine.