

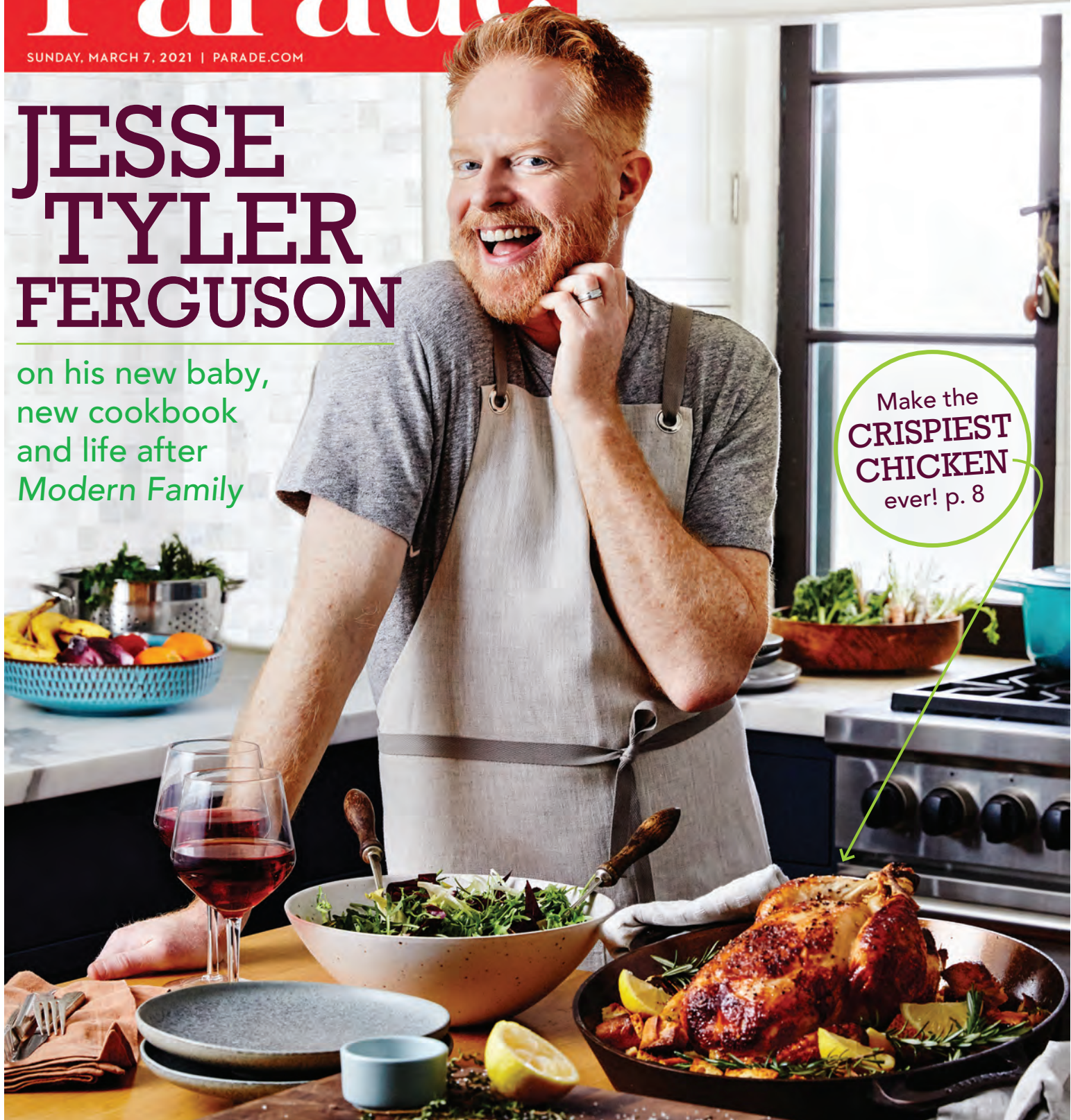
Parade

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JESSE TYLER FERGUSON

on his new baby,
new cookbook
and life after
Modern Family

Make the
**CRISPIEST
CHICKEN**
ever! p. 8



IN THE KITCHEN WITH JESSE TYLER FERGUSON

The popular sitcom star on his new cookbook with culinary partner Julie Tanous, fatherhood and life after *Modern Family*

By Alison Ashton

The beloved ABC sitcom *Modern Family* went off the air last April after 11 seasons. But the year since has been big for actor Jesse Tyler Ferguson, who co-starred on the series as the groundbreaking gay character Mitchell Pritchett. In July, he and real-life husband Justin Mikita welcomed their newborn son, Beckett. And on March 9, Ferguson, 45, will release his first cookbook, *Food Between Friends*, co-authored with his culinary partner, recipe developer and food writer Julie Tanous. *Parade* talked with the duo about finding friendship in the kitchen and how they meld their Southern and Southwestern tastes.



MODERN FAMILY BY JEFFREY MAYER/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES; BISCUIT & SYRUP BY ISTOCK

FOODIE SOUL MATES

Seven years ago, Ferguson was in full swing with *Modern Family* when he attended a dinner at a pop-up restaurant alone—a little half-heartedly, he admits. Tanous, 39, then a new mom taking a break from baby duty, was also there solo and found an empty seat next to Ferguson. As the two chatted, they discovered a mutual passion for great food, good cocktails and cooking.

“It was like love at first sight, an instant connection,” she says.

Ferguson wasn’t necessarily looking for a new pal, but Tanous was hard to resist. “I do think there’s a point in your life when you become a certain age and you just stop taking on new friends because it’s too much work,” he says. “Like, ‘I have my six or eight people that I really love.’ Julie snuck in like Indiana Jones, rolling herself into a little ball, getting in before the gate closed on no more friends.”

“I made the cut!” she says with a laugh.

The pair soon started cooking together. Ferguson was eager to learn from Tanous, a graduate of New York’s prestigious Institute of Culinary Education, an alum of *Saveur* magazine’s test kitchen and a seasoned recipe developer. Much as he loved cooking, he still struggled in the kitchen. “I was asking Julie, ‘How do we really dice an onion like the way they taught you in school?’ I was learning a lot of really great basics that I still use to this day. I don’t know that Julie learned anything from me.”

“That’s not true,” says Tanous. “I learned a lot. I learned that there is someone just as indecisive as me. We were making a cocktail once, and I was like, ‘Should we add another ice cube?’ It was a five-minute conversation—‘another ice cube?’”

“No... let’s leave it as is,” Ferguson recalls.

Like many aspiring cookbook authors, they launched a blog (julieandjessecook.com). And like any blog, it was a work in progress as they fine-tuned what they thought tasted good and shared their food on social media. He’s all about the Southwestern fare he grew up with in Albuquerque, N.M., while she’s rooted in the Southern cooking of her native Cullman, Ala. “I’d never met anyone that had this connection to New Mexico,” says Tanous. “A lot of these recipes organically came together because our Southern and Southwestern

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MODERN CLASSIC

Ferguson garnered five Emmy nominations for his portrayal of Mitchell Pritchett on ABC’s *Modern Family*.

HOW JESSE AND MITCH ARE ALIKE—OR NOT “He’s basically a version of me. When I auditioned, I just sort of came in as myself and offered that as a version of Mitchell. He’s probably more intelligent than I am. He’s a lawyer. I didn’t even take college.”

RELATIONSHIP HOW-TOS “I think [Mitch] is a really caring father,” says Ferguson. “I hope to be as good as he is.” He also learned a lot from working with his TV spouse, Eric Stonestreet (Cameron). “It was a very collaborative process that had to be a lot of give and take,” he recalls. “I think those tools helped me in my real relationship when that came around.”

FAMILY DYNAMICS “The hardest part about ending the show was not seeing these people who really became my second family.” But the cast remains close. Ed O’Neill, patriarch of the Pritchett family, accidentally called Ferguson recently. “It was like my dad checking in. He butt-dialed me and I answered, because that’s what a son would do.” His TV sister, Julie Bowen, touches base often to see how he’s doing with baby Beckett.

UNIVERSAL APPEAL Ferguson loved that Mitch and Cam resonated with gay and straight viewers alike. “I loved when straight couples would come up to us and a husband would say, ‘My wife is such a Mitch and I’m such a Cam.’ They really related to these two people.”

WILL THERE BE A SPINOFF FOR MITCH AND CAM? “It would have to feel really special and different than *Modern Family*,” Ferguson says. “Eric and I are certainly open to the idea, but we’re letting the writers figure out if that’s exciting to them. If they feel there’s more to tell, then I’m willing to listen.”



HIS AND HER INGREDIENTS

MEXICAN OREGANO

This variety boasts a deeper, woodsier, earthier flavor than its Mediterranean cousin, says Ferguson (though he says you can always use regular oregano in the recipes). Look for dried Mexican oregano at your supermarket or online. Try **Penzeys Mexican Oregano** (from \$2.50, penzeys.com).



CHILES

A true son of New Mexico, Ferguson always has both Hatch green chiles (fresh during their fleeting late-summer season or canned year-round) and dried red New Mexico chiles on hand. He makes sauce with each to use in everything from enchiladas to scrambled eggs.



SORGHUM SYRUP

Tanous is on a mission to make this buttery, caramelly Southern sweetener, made from the sorghum plant, as common as maple syrup in American kitchens. Try **Muddy Pond Sorghum Mill Pure Sorghum Syrup** (\$15 for 24 oz, amazon.com).



BUTTER

“To Julie, the most evil words you could say to someone are ‘No butter,’” Ferguson says. Tanous has won him over to butter. They slather it on roast chicken and use it in abundance for flaky biscuits and pie crust.



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ingredients just go together so well.”

They began by updating favorite childhood dishes, poring over their moms’ recipe cards—“*Everything* was on recipe cards back then,” Ferguson says—and quickly developed regional mashups that lend special flare to recipes in the book: Her Southern-style spoonbread is spiced up with Southwestern

chile peppers; he riffed on the concept of old-school chicken pot pie, but with Hatch green chiles for heat and tortillas in place of pastry dough.

A DELICIOUS DUO

Their different styles in the kitchen also complement each other. She’s a confident, wildly creative improviser. “I definitely am more of a rule follower,” says Ferguson. “But when you’re developing recipes, you have to break rules and tread new ground. I look forward to the day when I can just sort of wing it and not freak out if I forget something.”



Ferguson and Justin Mikita became dads to Beckett on July 7.

She admires his tireless work ethic, even as they were testing recipes last spring in the midst of the pandemic (convening by FaceTime before they deemed it safe to cook together again) and into the summer, when Beckett arrived. “Jesse pays attention to detail,” says Tanous. “Bless his heart, there were some recipes, both of us had fails, and he just pushed through, even when his baby was born.” Her veteran parenting advice to the new dad that first week: “Stop cooking.”

Before connecting with Ferguson, Tanous was an avowed loner in the kitchen. “Jesse’s probably the only person I want to cook with in the kitchen all day,” she says. “When we have a bad day, we make it funny. And we just have a cocktail.”

We’ll drink to that!

SOUTH MEETS SOUTHWEST



BUTTERMILK ROASTED CHICKEN WITH CRUNCHY CROUTONS

One of Ferguson and Tanous’ early experiments cooking together involved rubbing chicken with different fats to see which helped the skin brown best. After unsuccessful forays using olive oil (delicious but looked undercooked, Ferguson recalls) and ghee (clarified butter, often used in Indian food), they settled on butter. Soaking the bird in buttermilk before roasting helps too, says Tanous. “Not only do you get acidity and tenderness from the buttermilk, but it also helps the chicken brown and crisp.”

[Recipe on page 10](#)

GROUND BEEF AND PICKLE TACOS

This dish is an homage to one of Ferguson and Tanous’ favorite (sadly now closed) restaurants in Los Angeles. “The star of the place was always the ground beef and pickle taco,” they say. “It was like the secret love child of a hamburger and a taco.” This version features one of Ferguson’s must-have Southwestern ingredients: Hatch green chiles.

[Recipe on page 11](#)



ASPARAGUS AND LEEK GALETTE

Ferguson and Tanous adore a galette—a type of a free-form pie—for its simplicity and impressive results. “We made this for brunch once, and the reaction we got from our friends was as if we had just walked off the James Beard Award stage having won Chef of the Decade,” says Ferguson.

Mastering pastry dough is one of the many culinary lessons he learned from Tanous. “Julie taught me a surefire way to make piecrust,” he says. “Now I can’t be stopped!” A generous amount of butter (Tanous’ Southern influence) ensures this crust is flaky and delicious.

[Recipe on page 11](#)

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BUTTERMILK ROASTED CHICKEN WITH CRUNCHY CROUTONS

Combine 2 cups **buttermilk**, 2 Tbsp **kosher salt** and 1 sprig **rosemary** in a gallon-size zip-top plastic bag; shake to distribute salt. Add 1 (3½- to 4-lb) **whole roasting chicken**, neck and giblets removed. Seal bag; gently shake and massage to fully coat chicken. Refrigerate, breast side down, at least 6 hours and up to overnight. Remove chicken from refrigerator 1 hour before roasting.

Preheat oven to 425°F. Pour 1 Tbsp **grapeseed or canola oil** into a large cast-iron skillet; place in oven 10 minutes to preheat.

Remove chicken from bag, allowing as much marinade as possible to drip back into bag; discard bag and marinade. Pat chicken dry with paper towels. Stuff cavity with 1 **lemon**, cut into 4 wedges; 4 cloves **garlic**, smashed; and 1 sprig rosemary. Tie chicken legs together with kitchen twine.

Cut or tear 1 (10-oz) **baguette** into 1-inch cubes. Carefully remove skillet from oven; spread bread in bottom in a single layer. Top with 2 sprigs rosemary and nestle 4 cloves garlic, smashed, among bread cubes. Brush chicken all over with 4 Tbsp **butter**, melted, making sure to get all sides, between thighs and in all crevices. Season chicken all over with 1 Tbsp kosher salt and 1 tsp freshly ground **black pepper**. Place breast side up on top of bread cubes. Tuck wing tips under the body.

Roast chicken 20 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375°F. Roast 60–70 minutes, tenting with foil if skin is getting too dark, until croutons are golden brown and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the legs registers 165°F. Remove chicken from oven; let rest in pan 15 minutes. Carve chicken directly over the croutons so they soak up the juices. **Serves 4.**

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ASPARAGUS AND LEEK GALETTE

Crust: Cut ½ cup (1 stick) **unsalted butter** into ½-inch pieces; freeze at least 20 minutes. In bowl of a food processor, pulse ⅔ cup **all-purpose flour**, ⅔ cup **whole wheat flour**, ½ tsp **kosher salt** and ½ tsp **sugar** until combined. Add cold butter; pulse 15 times or until butter is broken down into pea-size pieces. Add 4 Tbsp ice water, 1 Tbsp at a time, pulsing a few times between each addition. Pulse until dough just begins to come together, adding more ice water, 1 tsp at a time, as needed. Dump dough onto a piece of plastic wrap; shape into a 5-inch disk and freeze 10 minutes. (Alternatively, dough can be made up to 3 days ahead and refrigerated.) Wipe out food processor.

Filling and Assembly: Preheat oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a medium skillet over medium, heat 1 Tbsp **olive oil**. Add 2 **leeks**, white and light green parts only, halved lengthwise and cut into ½-inch moons; cook 4 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Add 1 bunch **asparagus**, tough ends trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces (about 2 cups); cook 2–3 minutes or until firm-tender. Season with kosher salt and freshly ground **black pepper**. Remove pan from heat.

Place ¾ cup **crème fraîche**, ½ cup crumbled **feta cheese**, 1 tsp finely grated **lemon zest** and juice of 1 **lemon** in food processor; blend until smooth. Add 1 Tbsp chopped fresh **tarragon**; pulse to incorporate. Season with kosher salt and pepper.

On a floured surface, roll dough into a 12-inch round about ¼ inch thick. Transfer to prepared baking sheet. Spread dough with feta mixture, leaving a 1-inch border. Arrange asparagus and leeks on top. Fold edges of crust over filling, overlapping slightly, leaving center of filling exposed. In a small bowl, beat 1 large **egg yolk** and 1 Tbsp water. Brush edges with egg wash. Sprinkle edges with **flaky sea salt** and **toasted sesame seeds**. Bake 40–45 minutes or until crust is golden. Let stand 5 minutes before slicing and serving. **Serves 4.**

GROUND BEEF AND PICKLE TACOS

In a large skillet over medium, heat 2 Tbsp **grapeseed or canola oil**. Add ¾ cup diced **onion** and 3 cloves **garlic**, minced; cook 4 minutes or until tender. Add 1 lb 80/20 or 85/15 **ground beef**, 2 tsp **dried Mexican oregano**, 2 tsp **ground cumin**, 2 tsp **paprika**, 1 tsp **kosher salt**, 1 tsp **chipotle chile powder**, ½ tsp freshly ground **black pepper** and ¼ tsp **ground cinnamon**. Cook 8 minutes or until beef is no longer pink, stirring to crumble. Stir in ¼ cup **crushed canned tomatoes**, 1 (4-oz) can **diced Hatch green chiles**, ½ cup diced **dill pickles** and ½ cup **pickle juice**. Reduce heat to medium-low; cook, stirring occasionally, 15–20 minutes or until juices thicken and flavors have melded.

Spoon beef mixture into 8 **hard taco shells**. Sprinkle with shredded **cheddar cheese**, shredded **lettuce**, diced onion and more diced pickle. Serve with **sour cream**. **Serves 4.**



Visit [Parade.com/ferguson](https://www.parade.com/ferguson) for 25 hilarious and heartwarming quotes from *Modern Family*.

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