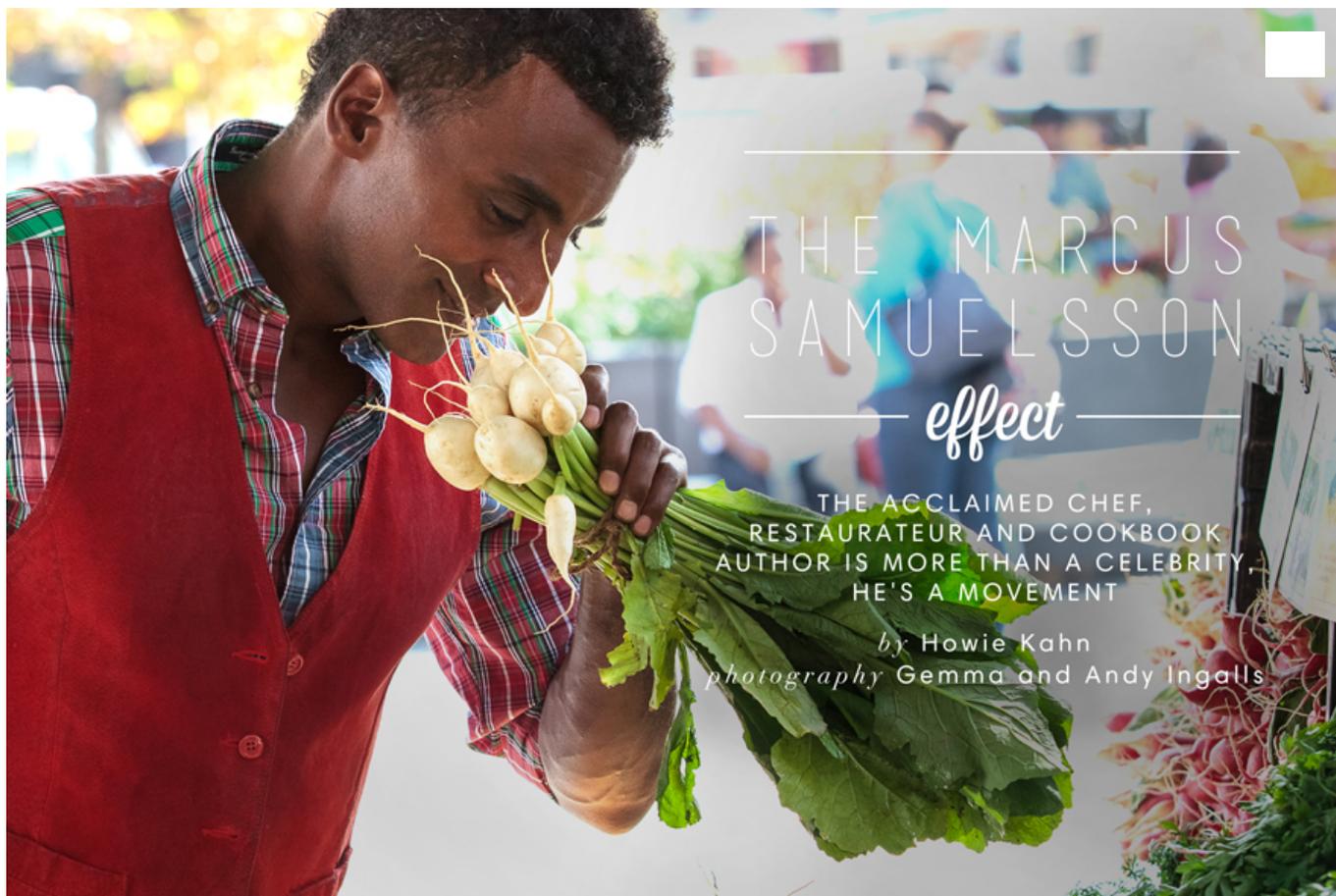


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THE ACCLAIMED CHEF,  
RESTAURATEUR AND COOKBOOK  
AUTHOR IS MORE THAN A CELEBRITY,  
HE'S A MOVEMENT

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*Gastronomy/*

# THE MARCUS SAMUELSSON EFFECT

THE ACCLAIMED CHEF, RESTAURATEUR AND COOKBOOK AUTHOR IS MORE THAN A CELEBRITY, HE'S A MOVEMENT

*by* HOWIE KAHN *photography* GEMMA AND ANDY INGALLS

It's just before Labor Day and Harlem is throbbing. "On these long weekends, people don't leave," says Marcus Samuelsson, weaving through the throng on 125th Street. "They come. They shut down blocks. It's block party after block party." Heads turn as Samuelsson, the 43-year-old chef and owner of Harlem's Red Rooster, negotiates the crowd. Kids start to follow him, literally walking in his footsteps. Women give him the once over as he bounds by in his dark, fitted jeans, his natty, plaid shirt, his vibrant, buttoned-up vest (red suede on the front, purple paisley in back). A man in all camouflage holding a camera loses his hardened expression and flashes Samuelsson a generous smile. "I love that guy," Samuelsson says, "he's out here every day with that camera, documenting everything."

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MOST POPULAR

For the last nine years, Harlem has been Marcus Samuelsson's home, but when he opened his acclaimed restaurant, [Red Rooster](#), in 2010, he made the leap from mere resident to one of the most visible and beloved pillars of his community. "Before we opened," he says, "I kept thinking about adding value. What did Harlem need? How can we activate this part of town? How should I activate myself in the community?"

Samuelsson veers right, into one of the answers—the 125th Street Farmers' Market in the sprawling concrete plaza outside the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building. "We didn't have a farmers' market up here at all," Samuelsson says, beelining toward a heap of ripe, yellow tomatoes. "This was a push we had to create. I absolutely helped, but it took the whole community. The only way to get things done is to get things done together, whether it's civil rights or getting a farmers' market, which is a civil right. It's just a different kind of journey."

"Is that Marcus Samuelsson? That's Marcus Samuelsson! Mom, I told you," says a teenager, approaching the local icon, who has bagged his tomatoes, radishes and plums, and is currently engaged in an impromptu African dance lesson with a couple of Ivorian women in colorfully patterned dresses and twisting head scarves. Samuelsson was raised in Sweden, but born in Ethiopia. "In Ethiopia," he tells the women, "the dancing is all shoulders." He shrugs enthusiastically to the bongo beat emanating from the Farmers' Market DJ booth. "You guys are more about the hips." Samuelsson smiles as the women begin to show off their moves. "It's called Coupé," they say. "I have your book," says the teenager, delighted by all the dancing. "It's called *Yes, Chef*."

Samuelsson's memoir, a *New York Times* bestseller with jacket copy from Bill Clinton, is just one in a string of recent high-profile success. Besides the book and the stunning popularity of Red Rooster, now one of Harlem's cultural anchors, Samuelsson is currently taping another season of the Food Network's *Chopped* and has recently been named as a "mentor" on the ABC cooking competition show *The Taste*. But it's his impact here that speaks loudest to his relevance. "I'm going to be a chef," the teenager tells him. "Five years ago, that's unheard of," says Samuelsson. "Now it happens all the time, all these kids wanting to do something through food." Another man approaches in hopes of landing his girlfriend a job. "Come by the restaurant and ask for Joe," Samuelsson tells him.

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"THAT'S WHY I PUT THE RESTAURANT IN FRONT OF A BUS STOP. I WANT TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH A TEACHER AND A NURSE AND A KNICKS PLAYER AND AN ARTIST. TWO OF THESE FOUR PEOPLE ARE NOT COMING BY TOWN CAR. I WANTED EVERYONE TO BE ABLE TO GET HERE."

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#### OFF THE GRID

Casey Neistat takes us inside his tricked-out studio

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“Some people know me from the TV,” Samuelsson says. “But the fact is, I *live* in this community. I walk to work everyday. Very often in urban areas, very few things are *of* the community. We have a lot of stuff, but it’s mostly from the outside. So, the community sees that we’re *here*, we’re of the community. We’re bringing jobs, we’re bringing food that’s good for you, we’ve got a spot to take your girl and make some memories.” Besides the Rooster, Samuelsson runs [Ginny’s Supper Club](#), a suave performance space, in its basement, reviving and modernizing the once-proud uptown tradition of dinner and show.

On the way into the restaurant, Samuelsson passes a homeless man sitting on a milk crate and tells him he’ll bring out something to eat in a few minutes. “It’s not just the fame game,” Samuelsson tells me. “It’s about representing.” Once inside, the chef takes a lap around the bright, energized room, shaking hands, slapping backs, laughing and chatting with friends and strangers. “I enjoy being with people,” he says, “all kinds of people. That’s why I put the restaurant in front of a bus stop. I want to have a conversation with a teacher and a nurse and a Knicks player and an artist. Two of these four people are not coming by Town Car. I wanted everyone to be able to get here.”

They come for Samuelsson. They come to celebrate Harlem. And, of course, they come for the food. With his Farmer’s Market haul in hand, Samuelsson hits the kitchen, fires up a burner, and, in about ten minutes, puts together one of the greatest salads this city has ever seen. “It’s all about the layers of raw and roasted,” he says (the addition of masterfully fried chicken doesn’t exactly hurt matters, either). “That’s what summer’s all about and you appreciate it even more right now—because there aren’t that many days left.”

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