



# Welcome to the totally insane world of FLAVORTOWN MARKET

Creating the set for *Guy's Grocery Games* was one of the most ambitious tasks ever attempted on food television. If only we could all shop here.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK PETERSON

PRODUCTS: BEN GOLDSTEIN/STUDIO D.



**In the real world,** building and stocking a new grocery store can take two years. When producers needed to create a lifesize, working supermarket for *Guy's Grocery Games*, they had three weeks.

"I knew that what they were asking me to do was a nearly impossible task," says supervising culinary producer Megan Palmer. But in no time, she and her team turned a 24,000-square-foot warehouse in Santa Rosa, CA, into Flavortown Market, one of the most elaborate sets ever built for a television game show. As many fans know from watching the show, it's a fully functioning grocery store—all 100,000 items have been inventoried and priced and are ready for scanning at the register.

It's 8 a.m. on a recent day of shooting, and three members of Megan's 14-person culinary team are prepping a produce delivery, trimming heads of romaine and spraying bunches of herbs. In another aisle, a crew member takes inventory of soup cans while guest judge Beau MacMillan examines all the types of rice available. Beau is impressed, and he hasn't even seen the lard shelf yet—it's stocked with five kinds, not including the Mexican *manteca* and some rendered duck fat in the refrigerated section. "We've gotten to the point where we can nerd out and

buy things we think the chefs will find cool," says supervising food stylist Tara O'Reilly. Guest judge Madison Cowan picks up a package of ahi tuna steaks. "I can't even get this in my own grocery store in Brooklyn," he says. Triple G's host, Guy Fieri, notes that this is a common sentiment: "Every chef walks out of here asking, 'Are you going to open one of these in Cincinnati?' or 'Can you bring this place to Texas?' I just say, 'Nope, this is one of a kind.'" Guy gets excited talking about the store's hidden gems, noting that whenever he walks through, he spots new items.

Technically, this set is close enough to Guy's house to be his neighborhood supermarket—he lives in Santa Rosa. Production moved here from Los Angeles after the first season because Guy's

In addition to hosting the show, Guy sometimes fills in as a checkout clerk. Below: Guy explains the episode to viewers; a script prompts Guy to announce one contestant's exit.



shooting schedule was so intense. Unfortunately for the cast and crew, the store isn't open for business after a shoot. "I'd do anything to have this be my actual grocery store," says Guy.

Those who do get to shop here—the four contestants on each episode—don't exactly have time to browse: They're subjected to a series of shopping and cooking challenges that send them tearing through the aisles looking for ingredients. Challengers "check out" one at a time until a winner emerges and gets to race

## WHAT'S IN STORE

At Flavortown Market, these obscure ingredients are always in stock.



Canned quail eggs



Berbere spice



Black treacle



Canned menudo



Filipino banana sauce



Gold leaf



King cake mix



Spotted dick pudding



through the store for the chance to win up to \$20,000. The whole ordeal is stressful under normal conditions, but today's battle is even more so, given the age of the competitors. It's a teen face-off, and Guy wants to make sure the players have a good time. "I'm not here to rattle anyone's cage," he says. "Seventy-five percent of the chefs who come in here walk away with

nothing but the experience. I want it to be a positive one."

Once the cameras roll, Guy spends extra time moving between stations, speaking with the teens individually about their game plan and reminding them to taste their food constantly for proper seasoning. Seven hours later, the contest is over, and Guy has managed to make all four kids feel

good about the day. They think they've been through the ringer, but they probably have no idea what the Triple G team has gone through to make it all happen. "We have a hundred-plus people working 12 to 16 hours a day," Guy says. "You can bring the football to the game, but you have to have a team that's ready to play—and this team? They're *ballers*."

## Attention, Flavortown Shoppers!

Take a closer look at the set of Guy's Grocery Games: The level of detail is, as Guy would say, off the hook!



Every product in the market has a working bar code; the price is the average cost in the real world.



Produce is delivered once or twice a week; any excess food is composted or donated to charity.



The production team's props even include a stack of circulars, just like you'd find in a normal store.



The shelves have wider spacing than a typical supermarket so foods won't come crashing down during competition.



The team stocks many brands "so it doesn't feel like, 'This shelf is brought to you by so-and-so,'" says producer Megan Palmer.



No contestant would ever need to write a check, but this platform takes the set to another level.



The store hours on Flavortown Market's door aren't real—this store closes only when shooting is done.



Producers go out of their way to source items that have cool retro labels—or funny names, like Slow As Molasses.



For most challenges, contestants have plenty of ingredient options—like six types of jarred cherries.

Catch  
Guy's Grocery  
Games  
Sundays at  
8 p.m. ET.