

the mouth of the south

When he's not in the studio recording a new album, **LUDACRIS** is acting (the upcoming movie *Fast Five*), working with youth at The Ludacris Foundation, or chatting up diners at his Atlanta restaurant, Straits. The Grammy-winning rapper could easily be described in the same way he prefers his cuisine and his Cognac—full of flavor and very, very smooth. INTERVIEW BY BEKAH WRIGHT



What's your favorite recipe to make at home?

I'm not that good of a cook yet, but I'm learning. I own a restaurant in Atlanta called Straits, and I love to make their Kung Pao Chicken "Lollipops"—crispy fried drumettes in a sauce made with dried red chiles.

You're a co-owner with chef Chris Yeo, who specializes in Singaporean cuisine. What was it about him that convinced you he'd be a good partner? When I decided to open a restaurant, everyone was wondering, *Is he gonna do soul food?* I wanted to do something totally out of the norm. I love all the sauces and spices Yeo uses in every dish that make each one so different. The food is immaculate.

Did you help shape the menu for the restaurant?

Absolutely. Knowing that Atlanta, as a city, has a southern palate, there were certain spices and flavors I wanted to make sure were used, whether they were in the lobster or shrimp. Having peach cobbler on the menu had to happen, too, since we're located in Georgia.

Speaking of soul food, where do you go when you want a fix?

My favorite soul food restaurant is The Beautiful Restaurant in Atlanta. I order the catfish, greens, and candied yams.

Tell us about your Cognac.

My Cognac is called Conjure. I went to France and worked with Philippe Braastad Tiffon,

Birkedal Hartmann's master blender, to create the perfect blend. It's VS, VSOP, and XO—all the premier Cognacs from France's Cognac regions, like Grande Champagne, Petite Champagne, and Borderies—mixed with eaux-de-vie. It's really smooth and very mixable. I like to drink it straight because you can taste how smooth it is.

Of all the places you've traveled, where's the best food?

France. Everything is so well prepared and fresh, you can taste it. My favorite dish when I'm there is duck confit.

What are your must-haves when you're on tour or a movie shoot?

Fiji water, spinach salads, almonds, tilapia, and fresh fruit. Those are my staples.

Do you have a particularly memorable meal?

On my birthday, I went to Café Martorano, an Italian restaurant in Fort Lauderdale. Since it was my birthday, they just kept bringing out dishes, family-style—everything from chicken Parmesan to lobster, chicken wings, and Philly cheesesteaks.

When you visit your home state of Illinois, what do you crave?

Chicago thin-crust pizza from Giordano's with mushrooms, green olives, and extra cheese.

Any comfort foods?

Soft tacos filled with a little lettuce, cheese, tomatoes, and turkey, beef or fish. They're one thing I do know how to cook. I'm having them for dinner tonight. ■