

Family Ties

The Chrisleys are keeping the laughs close and family closer

Words by Vanessa Pascale

Photo Credit: USA Network



I am in the Ritz-Carlton New York's Star Lounge, widely known for its Afternoon Tea and list of perfected libations, seated at the mahogany bar waiting. Steeped in luxurious old-world flourishes, it's a fitting establishment to meet with an affluent entrepreneur, namely a self-made millionaire, like Todd Chrisley, who has recently made a name for himself as a reality star phenomenon.

Minutes later, Todd arrives with his son Chase, and their publicist. Father and son are in their signature clean-cut attire: Todd in blue jeans and a navy blue blazer with shawl lapels trimmed in a smattering of tiny white polka dots over a crisp white button up; and Chase in a dark half-zip sweater and khakis. (They will argue, good-naturedly, later about whether or not Todd dresses the entire family, including Chase.) After a brief introduction, we walk a few steps over to Auden Bistro & Bar. The restaurant is nearly vacant as lunch

hours have just ended --it's technically closed, but they allow us in. With ample seating to select from, we settle ourselves into a corner banquette, Todd beside me and Chase across from me.

Todd, the outspoken patriarch, and his fair-haired family are the stars of USA's Georgian family-centric reality show, *Chrisley Knows Best*, which returned for its second season in mid-October. USA Network's motto is "Characters Welcome," and characters they present. It's nothing but big, entertaining personalities in the Chrisley's Atlanta-suburb household, where Todd resides with his wife Julie and their children, Chase, 18, Savannah, 17, Grayson, 8, and 2-year-old granddaughter, Chloe. Their eldest son, Kyle (Chloe's father), eldest daughter Lindsie, and Faye (Todd's mother) also appear on the show sporadically.

Despite the family's inherent ability to whip out side-splitting comebacks at the drop of a hat, Todd tells me that he didn't think there was a television show to produce here. Annie Kate Pons, a colleague of Todd's,

suggested a reality show based on Todd and his family, and it transpired from there. (She's a producer of their show now.) In the second season, we watch the Chrisleys embrace change --at least Todd tries to. He motions to Chase. "This one has turned 18 and we have Savannah who has started to date. And my mother has tried to dip her toe in the pond now... My wife, Julie, has gone back to work. She's two years outside of her diagnosis of breast cancer, so she's doing great. We're blessed --a lot of struggles, but a lot of blessings," says Todd.

Viewers tune in to *Chrisley Knows Best* for the comical, candid family dynamic. Even the incredulous eat their words after witnessing the Chrisley's high jinks and failed attempts to escape Todd's watchful eye. Impressively, each family member holds their own when it comes to dishing out a swift explanation or an on point wisecrack. Sprinkled in, as well, are words of wisdom, such as Chase's famous line, "You gotta risk it to get the biscuit." And then there's Todd, with his unbridled sardonic pop culture-infused retorts and

stony, disapproving stare --both of which are very entertaining and components of his overall appeal.

When Savannah appears looking disheveled in season one, Todd can't help but compare her dramatic change in appearance to transforming from Heidi Klum to Amy Winehouse. "Those things just come out and it's normally very fitting. Think about it, she went in, she had this beautiful hair, looking gorgeous and then she comes out looking like Amy Winehouse after a 3-day drunk. I mean, ya know?" The humor rests significantly in his delivery. As I laugh at his explanation, a compliment to his humor, Chase makes sure that I'm aware that his father's razor-sharp wit is ascribed to his grandparents, Todd's late father, Gene, and mother, Faye. Todd has been exposed to this brand of humor since he was a child. "My grandpa was like ten times better though," Chase adds.

To give me a glimpse into Gene's humor, Todd launches into a story. His father would show-off photos of his "good-looking" children and grandchildren to co-workers so often that he claimed that this was the reason people didn't like him. "I'd say, 'Daddy, people like you.' At his job, they'd say, 'I'm sorry we don't have supermodels for our children.'" "I wasn't even born yet!" Chase interjects. "See what I mean? This is what I have to deal with," Todd exclaims. "He'd say to them, 'I know you're going to talk about me when I walk away and say I was bragging, but I wanted to show y'all, yet another from my corner that's beautiful,' 'Cause he attributed all of the looks coming from him."

I listen intently as Todd goes on. "My mother would say, 'Well, Todd looks just like me.' He'd say, 'Faye, shut the hell up! Aint nobody in your family ever been good-looking. My family is good-looking people. You was just rare in that bunch.'" Todd pauses. "He

would've enjoyed this ride that we're on (referring to the show). Today, if he were alive, he would love the fact that he could look on his television and see his family 'cause he was very proud of his family." I can attest that the Chrisleys are unquestionably good-looking in-person, and it goes without saying, hilarious. But these aren't the only reasons they make great television.



Todd's impulsive outbursts and watch-you-like-a-hawk parenting keep us coming back for more. In season one, Todd flings Chase's iPhone into the lake and laptop into the pool. Was any of this planned? "Chase, you wanna?" Todd asks. Chase looks up from his cell phone. I think some people would be a little upset. No? I query. "Oh, I stay upset. I stay upset," Chase responds seriously. "But you didn't hear her question," says Todd. "No, that's not setup. He just throws my stuff in the pool," says Chase with a straight face.

How does one prevent their electronics from taking an impromptu dive? "Stay off porn sites," Todd says matter-of-factly. His expression, of course, elicits more laughter from me. "This hand giveth and this hand taketh away." "But he doesn't take it away. He takes it and destroys it, so I don't get it back," Chase corrects. "Here's my thing about that. A.) I paid for it. B.) When

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

"He has never seen a camera or anything with a reflection that he did not love," says Todd of Chase. "He's one to talk," says Chase. "Oh Jesus," Todd replies. "In his closet, he's got mirrors, so he can always look at himself," Chase exclaims. "'Cause I'm sure you heard *I live in the closet*. So there you go... At the end of the day, we can sit and go back and forth with each other like this, but if someone else jumps in and starts talking bad about one of us, then the other six stand up. That makes me feel good," says Todd.

I bought you this, you were told, this is the purpose. It's not for you to be sitting up in your room looking at some teen porn site..." While this is a (semi) serious issue at hand, it's hard for me to suppress my laughter. This sort of banter is exactly what you see on their show and what captivates their audience. Neither misses a shot during their impressive volley. "That was awhile ago. I've moved on from that," Chase replies. "Let's hope it's in a better direction. If not, he's going to get a seeing eye dog because it's been laid for him," says Todd.

I catch my breath and look at Todd. Do you think that your parenting is a little...? I pause to avoid placing a label on his methods. "Extreme?" Todd finishes. Yes. "I don't, because if I felt it was extreme I wouldn't do it. Let me just ask you, if you had a child, is there any level that you would not go to prevent them from having heartache? That's what you're watching on television." "Except that he skips the small steps, and goes straight to the extreme. It's not a small step," Chase chimes in. "I don't think that my parenting is extreme for us. It may not work for some people in this country, but at the end of the day, I didn't consult this country when I decided to have these children, therefore I'm not going to consult this country when I'm trying to rear my children."

You can charge him as being an overprotective father, but at the core of his meddling is an abundance of love for his family and the innate desire to keep them safe, and close by -- the latter being the reason Todd conceived the concept of the store shown in season one. "I felt if we built a brand that everyone can work in, we can all work together and it would hold our family tighter together... I told Chase, you should be an attorney, because attorneys love to hear themselves talk, that's you." He looks over at Chase. "You can handle whatever we have to do that's legal for the store. I hope that each one of them will find something in the store that they love, and they want to do and that they view it as a way to give something that's beautiful to the world. So, I hope that's what's going to happen." Though he's come to realize that all of his children possess different dreams for themselves, Todd has not relinquished his own. **ML**

Southern Comforts

A CHRISLEY CHRISTMAS

"Julie loves Christmas. She puts up six trees every year. All of them have their own tree. They're a little spoiled, which is why I'm constantly having to put my hand on them."

BIGGEST SPLURGE

"I don't do a lot of splurging on myself." Chase snickers and exposes that Todd "goes to the mall probably everyday." They go back and forth about who he's shopping for. Todd claims that he shops for all of them since he has all the style, while Chase argues that this is not the case. "He acts like he has this great sense of style. When in reality, he's just getting old and this is him trying to be young. That's what *this* is. He's having a midlife crisis," says Chase. Todd motions to Chase. "That's my midlife crisis."

WHAT DO YOU HOPE VIEWERS TAKE AWAY FROM WATCHING CHRISLEY KNOWS BEST?

"That you can look at our show and say, 'See, it's not as bad as I thought. They're going through almost the same thing we're going through, and look how they're getting through it.' Everyone has a situation, but it's your situation, therefore it's worse to you. But when you can watch someone else going through the same life struggles you're going through -- we're all going through it together. We're all in this world together. Rather than stomping you down, I want to give you a hand to lift you up."