

Chefs. Dishes. Restaurants

— *magazine* —



WHERE FOOD
BECOMES MEMORY

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Alex Fenot
Founder, Chef,
Author



In kitchens we always say if we wrote a book, nobody would believe us. Then when somebody writes a book about kitchens, all the nonsense and the ugly truth disappear.

And we end up with a beautiful story in a beautiful restaurant about beautiful people who serve and cook beautiful food for beautiful customers.

Who gives a crap? Do you want to read that story? I don't.



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BEING a CHEF



Alexander Jahn
Private Chef, High Cuisine
International, Fine dining
Co Founder

Question: Think back to your childhood. What was it like where you grew up?
Did you always imagine becoming a chef?

Answer: Since I was little, I helped out in my parents' restaurant. That means I prepared salads, washed dishes on weekends to earn pocket money, and was always in gastronomy. My mother is a cook, my aunt is a cook, my uncle was a butcher. Half of the family was in gastronomy. My older sister was also in chef raining back then. I couldn't imagine anything else but working with food and becoming a chef. **Question:** When did cooking become more than just a hobby for you? When did you feel: "This is what I want to do"? How did your family react back then? And what future did you dream of back then?

Gourmet cuisine, Michelin stars, travel, or something else? **Answer:** It was very clear to me early on that I wanted to learn the profession of a chef. I had tried various internships before, as a mechatronics engineer. As a mechatronics engineer, it became clear to me that cooking with fresh ingredients, creating my own creations, had become important, through helping out in my parents' restaurant since I was eight. I always enjoyed creating new dishes, trying new things, combining ingredients. How my family reacted: They were happy. They were happy that I was the third generation in the profession and wanted to follow in my parents' footsteps and take over the restaurant. When I was young, I imagined staying in the small Sauerland in Germany, where I grew up, and taking over my parents' business. Only later, after my apprenticeship as a chef, did I realize that I wanted more. That I wanted many more ingredients, much more travel. I wanted to discover the world. I wanted to learn more and also get the feeling that I could not only cook the dishes from home, but that there are many more combinations, many more inspirations, and many more tastes in the world than just what I knew from home.





BEING a CHEF

Question: With which foods or ingredients do you feel most connected when cooking? Is there anything that simply feels like yourself on the plate?

Answer: Yes, there is one food I feel very connected to, and that is rice. Rice is an ingredient that you can combine a thousand times, vary, and it supports every taste. It is an ingredient, a plant, that expresses me. For that reason, inconspicuous,

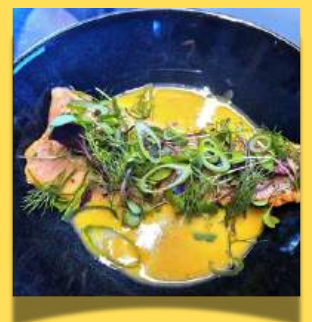
but with so many creative possibilities, with so much variety and so many consistency options.

Question: Looking back at your career so far: Is there a workplace that particularly stands out in your memory, in a positive sense? What made it so special?

Answer: Looking back at my youth, when I was 26, there was a place that particularly shaped me, in a positive sense, which I believe also brought about a change in myself. And that was the Hay-Adams Hotel in Washington, D.C., in the Lafayette Restaurant. As a young Sous-Chef, I had the opportunity to lead a team of 35 chefs. A huge 5-star luxury hotel. To participate, to be creative, and also to face the challenges, as I was the youngest in the team. I learned a lot, both humanly and culinarily. Peter Schaffrath, my Executive Chef, was an excellent man who stood with us in the kitchen from 7 AM to 10 PM. Not someone who sat in the office, but someone who got hands-on and showed what a chef's career should be like. That shaped me a lot and, of course, changed me very positively. The passion was already there, but it grew even bigger, more intense, and yes, it was a lot of fun.

Question: And in contrast, was there a moment or a place that really put you to the test?

Answer: Yes, there was a place in Fuerteventura, in the Canary Islands. After my military service in Germany, compulsory military service, I went to Spain and had a junior chef position that not only challenged me but also depressed me. It was for Robinson Club, a club hotel in Jandía Playa. As a junior chef, I worked 10 to 12 hours every day and realized that processing leftovers and conjuring something with bad food, bad quality food, was not what I wanted to do. I felt uncomfortable processing bad things, which were B-ware, C-ware, because the budget for purchasing was not available. I didn't see the passion. Also, being far from my family was quite unusual for me at that young age, and I missed my family very much, I must honestly say. I often thought about going back. But the time there challenged me a lot in many ways, humanly, professionally, but with the support of my family, I moved on to another country, to another challenge.





BEING a CHEF

Question: Nowadays, food is ubiquitous. On television, Instagram, YouTube, and chefs are almost stars. How do you see that? Do you think it benefits or harms the profession?

Answer: I am ambivalent about this question. Instagram and YouTube do not reflect what makes a chef. You see beautifully arranged plates, you see recipes from amateurs. But not the work behind it and the passion one has for this profession. It has partly benefited the profession of a chef, because food and craftsmanship are more respected. The chef behind the scenes, who works 10-12 hours, and after work still thinks about new recipes, new creations, and new menus, is nowadays shown in a positive light. But it is much underestimated. This means, I have experienced it back then in the restaurant: "Yes, the chef on TV does it differently.

Why don't you do it that way?" Or half-knowledge is sometimes dangerous. Our guests know what techniques work nowadays and how, which is of course positive.

I can't say. It's difficult to answer this question.

Question: In your opinion, how is the culinary world developing? What changes, positive and negative, do you expect?

Answer: My personal assessment, positively, is that cooking is celebrated much more. In the future, there will be opportunities, and the development of the culinary world will become more and more elaborate. This means we will be challenged more and more to work more creatively, more effectively, and through the possibilities of the internet and, of course, through the new generations, there are many more opportunities. What is negative for the future of culinary arts is the attitude of our youth. I have trained for a long time and I am concerned about the willingness to work of the new generation. No longer working late, no longer working weekends, but cooking is more than just work. Cooking is a calling and a passion that, unfortunately, is increasingly fading today. What do I expect? I don't expect much. I only expect that our craft will be valued or put back into the spotlight of reality. Less appearance than being. The work behind every product and every recipe should be clarified more, shown more intensely.

Question: And you personally? What do you hope for the future? Do you have dreams, plans, or goals you are secretly working on?

Answer: As a private chef, I actually hope that I can continue to work in my profession for a long time, that I maintain the passion I have now, and that I enjoy it every day anew. And secretly, I have such a good feeling that I will continue this way even in retirement. I will cook until the end of my life, privately as well as for my guests. Secretly, I am working on various concepts to present food and the profession differently. I am working on art projects, on cooperations, and that is what I would like to do for the next 30, 40 years: show the world how beautiful it is to eat. According to my motto: Eating is life and art at the same time.





BEING a CHEF

Question: What is your absolute favorite food? The one dish you could never get enough of?

Answer: It's hard to define what I like to eat most. But I think when I finish work, making myself a good piece of bread with sausage and cheese, with a fried egg on top, and frying it in butter, that's my favorite food, which I can never get enough of.

It's a dish my grandma made for me as a child. It's simple, but it's made with so much love.

Question: Was there ever a moment when you doubted this path? Where you perhaps thought: "Maybe I should do something else?"

Answer: Yes, there was a moment in my life when I doubted whether my profession still truly fulfilled me. It's a difficult topic for me. Back then, I was 30 and had lost my daughter at three months old. She unfortunately died of SIDS. In that moment, I doubted myself and went into burnout. At that time, I was at the grand opening of a new restaurant as a deputy head chef. I invested a lot of time in the business and my work and was unfortunately not there for my partner, ex-partner. This unfortunately drove me into a burnout, where one day I stood in the kitchen. The order came in. My head was full. I couldn't think of anything else but my private situation, and I forgot how to cook. I forgot everything. I doubted myself. I doubted the profession. Whether this was the right path for the future. It was a difficult time for me, where I doubted my career and path a lot. Since I had previously visited over twelve countries. I had traveled to almost 16 countries. For 12 years, I had worked in various positions, in various restaurants, hotels, on a cruise ship. I had actually lived my life for cooking and for the experience. But I had no experience in that situation. What did that bring me? I don't know. But after 1.5 years of a break from cooking, I pulled myself together and tried again. I became self-employed and went into the private sector as a private chef. There, of course, I received completely different feedback, different situations. Of course, the work was just as much. For 12 hours, I traveled the world with my clients, was able to work with many more different ingredients, where price-performance played no role. Which, of course, brought back my motivation and passion more and more. That's why I wouldn't do anything else in my life. Cooking is something that has stabilized me and also given me the strength to overcome many difficult situations in the end. When I doubted myself, I developed new recipes, new creations, tinkered, and was able to get so involved in the work at home that I felt comfortable.





BEING
a
CHEF

Question: Being a chef is not easy. It can be very demanding both physically and mentally. How do you take care of yourself during these difficult moments?

Answer: Cooking is physically and mentally very demanding. Fulfilling clients' wishes, getting the right products, the time commitment that no one sees, the passion behind it. How I compensate for this privately is very simple. I do various projects that, of course, also have to do with cooking and food. I do art projects, I read a lot. I compensate for my work with my passion. For me, cooking is not work. For me, it's a dream come true, where I have to say, I love what I do every day. It fulfills me. It also fulfills me privately. I love cooking for my family at home. I love cooking for friends and I look forward to the faces when you can conjure joy and a smile on every face with a beautiful dish. Privately, cooking completely consumes me. Not just planting in the garden, not just the herbs I grow, not just the pictures I paint. Everything is the same for me. It all belongs to the profession of a chef. Privately, I forge my own knives. Privately, I am always looking for new things to combine and try out, and I love tinkering with new recipes.



Question: How do you envision the future of cooking and chefs in the next 10 to 20 years?

Answer: I have mixed feelings. As I mentioned before, today's youth are no longer willing to feel this passion, neither to stay longer in the business nor privately. Cooking has a status from fine dining to fast food. It's difficult to say. In the next 10 to 20 years, I see it as very difficult for the profession. Everyone nowadays wants to eat quickly, grab something, just stuff it in, to put it bluntly. But no one likes to wait more than 15 minutes in a restaurant, but good food takes time. The stress and challenges in the profession are constantly increasing. The shortage of skilled workers is also becoming more and more noticeable in gastronomy, because hardly anyone, with a few exceptions, really wants to align their life with a profession, with a craft. Thus, I see the situation as difficult. But accepting challenges is also something that must happen more and more in the future. A change must become apparent in gastronomy. Whether it's wages and the willingness to have a hands-on mentality. Unfortunately, chefs in gastronomy are not really well paid, which of course further supports and makes this shortage of skilled workers even more difficult. A skilled worker means practicing a craft with passion, learning new techniques every day, gaining new experiences, and of course, sacrificing oneself.

And I am ambivalent about whether that will still be the case in the future. Unfortunately, everyone would like to have a Michelin star or cook on TV or be a YouTuber or influencer. But that has nothing to do with the chef's profession. Being a chef means having a calling and constantly developing oneself. That is my personal opinion.





CULINARY METHODOLOGY



Yevheniia Klymenko

From Engineering to the Kitchen:

How I Learned to Design Systems That Feed People

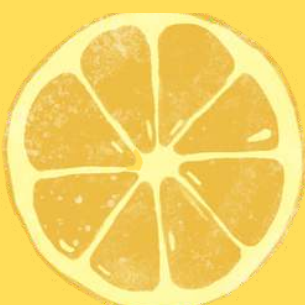


People often assume chefs choose this profession because they love cooking.

For me, it was never only about cooking, and honestly, it took me years to understand why. My first professional training wasn't culinary. It was engineering. I studied materials science, which is, at its core, the study of how things hold together under stress. It turns out that background was an excellent preparation for a professional kitchen. I didn't grow up dreaming of becoming a chef. When I entered my first professional kitchens, I was not thinking about titles or awards. I was trying to learn, keep up, and understand whether I belonged there. What surprised me was how quickly I became fascinated not only by food, but by the environment around it. I watched how people moved, where mistakes repeated, where communication broke down, and why some teams could perform consistently while others struggled, even when they had talented people.

The answer, I discovered, almost never lives in the recipes. It lives in the structure behind them, or in the absence of it. When I began my career, I wasn't dreaming of Michelin stars. I was dreaming of understanding. I wanted to learn how the machine worked. Over time, working across very different environments and countries, I stopped looking for the answer in individual brilliance and started looking for the foundations that allow teams to succeed. My career was shaped largely in Ukraine, where restaurant teams often learn to be resourceful, adaptable, and resilient. Those lessons stayed with me long after I moved abroad. Over the years, these ideas evolved into Kitchen OS: The Klymenko Method for Kitchen Operations, a practical framework for building professional kitchens that function consistently, sustainably, and humanely.

This is what I mean when I describe myself as a Kitchen System Architect. Not someone who designs menus, though I do that too, but someone who designs the operational logic behind the restaurant itself. The workflows, communication architecture, training protocols, and decision-making frameworks. A kitchen where excellence isn't dependent on who happens to show up that morning.





CULINARY METHODOLOGY



People often ask me about the difference between fine dining and more volume-driven formats like steakhouses. My honest answer is that the difference is in your relationship with time. In fine dining, time is an ingredient. You have the luxury of depth, days to develop a sauce and weeks to refine a dish before it reaches a guest. The creative margin is wide, but the margin for error is razor-thin. In high-volume formats, time is a constraint you engineer around. The question shifts from how do we make this perfect? to how do we make this excellent, consistently, at 200 covers, with a team that has turned over since last season? That's a different kind of mastery, and in many ways, a more humbling one. Both environments taught me something irreplaceable. Fine dining taught me to taste more carefully. Volume taught me to think more clearly. The question of women in professional kitchens is one I've lived rather than observed from a distance. When I began, professional kitchens were still heavily male-dominated, and the unspoken expectation was that women would either adapt to the culture that existed or leave. I adapted, but on my own terms.

I chose not to compete on volume or aggression. I competed on clarity. A kitchen that runs on well-designed standards doesn't require the loudest person in the room to hold its quality. It requires the most precise thinking.

Today the industry has changed, and opportunities are genuinely better. But leadership in any kitchen, for anyone, still requires something that doesn't change with the headlines: the ability to make decisions under pressure, consistently, when it costs you something. That standard is the same regardless of gender. The strongest teams I've built or been part of were not defined by who was male or female. They were defined by trust, accountability, and a shared commitment to the work. There was a period, and I'll be honest about this, when I considered walking away. Long hours, relentless pressure, and the particular exhaustion of working in kitchens that had no interest in becoming better versions of themselves. I remember standing in a kitchen I hadn't designed and couldn't fix and thinking, "Maybe not this." Sometimes you do have to leave a bad kitchen. But for me, the deeper answer was to understand how better kitchens are built. That shift in perspective has defined everything since.

My favorite thing to eat? Something simple, made with full attention. A bowl of borscht at someone's grandmother's table. A ripe tomato with good salt and bread. I've become suspicious of chefs who only get excited by complexity. Great cooking begins with respect for simple things done right. These days I spend a lot of time working with pastry, and I love the precision it demands. Laminated doughs, fermented batters, and sugar work are places where engineering thinking and culinary intuition meet. They remind me that creativity and discipline are not opposites. They depend on each other.





CULINARY METHODOLOGY



As for the future, I think the restaurants that will matter are the ones that are honest about what they are.

Technology will continue to reshape logistics, sourcing, and even creativity. But the fundamental experience of being welcomed, fed, and genuinely cared for is not automatable. What changes is the sophistication required to deliver it. The Head Chef of the future will be, more than anything else, a systems thinker and a culture builder. The ability to develop people, transfer knowledge, and create operational structures that outlast your own presence will matter as much as what you can do with a knife. One of the projects that grew out of this work is Kitchen OS: The Klymenko Method for Kitchen Operations, a practical framework for chefs who want to build kitchens that function consistently, sustainably, and humanely.

I also want to continue teaching and sharing my methodology with culinary students and professionals.

For me, knowledge transfer is one of the most important parts of leadership. A strong chef should not only create good dishes, but also build structures that other people can understand, repeat, and develop further. And I want to keep building: new kitchens, new teams, and new ideas. Because in the end, the restaurants I care most about are not built by recipes alone. They are built by people, by knowledge, and by the foundations that connect them, designed carefully enough that they keep working long after the chef has left the room.





CHEF'S LIFE



Chef, Author Marco Silva



Thinking back to your childhood—what was it like where you grew up? Did you always imagine yourself becoming a chef?

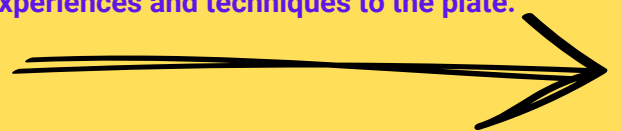
I grew up in Brazil in a family where both food and music were at the center of our lives. My mother was a professional violinist, and from the age of four I began studying classical piano. Music surrounded me from an early age and taught me discipline, creativity, and dedication. At the same time, some of my fondest memories were spent in the kitchen with my grandmother. I watched her prepare traditional Brazilian meals from scratch and learned that food was much more than nourishment—it was how family gathered, celebrated, and showed love. As a child, I wasn't sure whether I would become a musician or a chef, but I knew I wanted a life built around creativity, passion, and bringing joy to others.

When did cooking become more than just an interest for you—when did it feel like this is what I want to do? How did your family react at the time? And back then, what kind of future were you dreaming about?

My path to becoming a chef was not a straight line. When I was 22 years old, my mother sent me to Portugal to complete my classical piano studies. After graduating, I realized that something was missing from my life. While music would always be a part of me, I found myself constantly thinking about food, ingredients, and the happiness I felt whenever I was in a kitchen. That realization led me to Paris, where I enrolled at Le Cordon Bleu. To support myself, I played piano at night in hotels and bars throughout Paris while attending culinary school during the day. Those years were demanding but incredibly rewarding. Music taught me precision and discipline, while culinary school gave me a new way to express creativity. Looking back, it was the perfect combination. At the time, I wasn't dreaming about Michelin stars or television. My dream was simply to learn, travel, discover new cultures, and become the best chef I could be. That journey eventually took me around the world and shaped the chef I am today.

What kind of food or ingredients do you feel most connected to when you cook? Is there something that just feels like you on a plate?

My cooking is a reflection of my journey. At its heart, it combines Brazilian flavors, French technique, and the local ingredients of the places I've lived and worked throughout my career. I feel especially connected to fresh herbs, seafood, tropical fruits, olive oil, and ingredients that are treated with respect and simplicity. I often say that I cook the way I learned to play music—with rhythm, balance, emotion, and attention to every detail. If there is one dish that represents me, it would be Moqueca, the traditional Brazilian fish stew. It tells the story of my roots while allowing me to bring my own experiences and techniques to the plate.





CHEF'S LIFE



Looking back on your journey so far, is there a place you worked that really stayed with you—in a good way? What made it special? And on the flip side, was there a moment or place that really tested you?

Every place I've worked has shaped me in some way, but my time at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris was truly transformative. It gave me the classical foundation that still guides me today. Working internationally also had a profound impact on me. Living and leading kitchens in places such as Dubai, Papua New Guinea, Australia, Portugal, and throughout the United States taught me that food is a universal language that connects people regardless of culture or background. One of the greatest tests of my career was owning and operating my own fine dining restaurant for eight years. The responsibility of leading a business, especially through the challenges of COVID, required resilience, creativity, and determination. Those experiences taught me lessons that no culinary school ever could.

These days, food is everywhere—TV, Instagram, YouTube—and chefs are almost like celebrities. How do you feel about that? Do you think it helps the profession, or does it take something away from it? I think it does both. On one hand, it has introduced people to new cuisines, cultures, and techniques. It has inspired many young people to pursue culinary careers and has elevated the appreciation for food around the world. On the other hand, social media often focuses on the final image rather than the years of hard work, sacrifice, and discipline behind it. Cooking is not just about creating beautiful plates. It is about consistency, hospitality, teamwork, and caring for people. The challenge is making sure we celebrate both the artistry and the craftsmanship of the profession.

From your perspective, where is the culinary world heading? What changes—good or bad—do you see coming? I believe people are becoming more interested in authenticity. Guests want to know where ingredients come from, who prepared their food, and the story behind the meal. I also see a growing focus on sustainability, local sourcing, and meaningful dining experiences rather than luxury for the sake of luxury. One concern is that technology and convenience can sometimes disconnect us from traditional cooking skills. Preserving those skills while embracing innovation will be important for the future of our profession.

What about you personally—what are you hoping for next? Any dreams, plans, or goals you're quietly working toward?

I recently published my first cookbook, *A Chef's Compass: A Brazilian Heart, A Parisian Hand, A Mountain Home*, which has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career. Looking ahead, I hope to continue teaching, cooking, and sharing stories through food. I would love to expand my private chef work, grow my cooking classes, and continue building the *A Chef's Compass* brand. I am also working on future book projects, including a dessert-focused cookbook that celebrates some of my favorite recipes and memories. More than anything, I want to continue bringing people together through food and creating experiences that become lasting memories.





CHEF'S LIFE



What's your all-time favorite food—the one thing you could never get tired of?

That is an easy answer: seafood. Whether it's fresh fish, shellfish, grilled octopus, or a simple seafood stew, I never get tired of it. It reminds me of my Brazilian roots and many of the coastal places I have been fortunate to live and work. 9. Is there a dish you love cooking the most? Something that always brings you joy or comfort? Moqueca, without question. Every time I make it, it brings me back to Brazil. The aromas of coconut milk, peppers, cilantro, and fresh seafood instantly create a sense of comfort and connection. It is a dish that tells a story, and I love sharing that story with guests around the world.

Have you ever had a moment where you doubted this path? Where you thought, maybe I should do something else?

Like many chefs, I have experienced challenging moments throughout my career. Long hours, business pressures, and personal sacrifices can make you question things. But every time I considered another path, I found myself returning to the kitchen. Cooking has never felt like just a job—it is part of who I am. The joy of creating something meaningful for others always reminds me why I chose this profession.

Being a chef isn't easy—it can be exhausting, both physically and mentally. How do you take care of yourself during those tougher moments?

I find balance by spending time with family, traveling, gardening, and being outdoors. I enjoy growing herbs and vegetables at home because it reconnects me with the ingredients that inspire my cooking. I also enjoy spending time with my children, grandchildren, and my partner Steve. Most importantly, I try to remember why I started. When things become stressful, returning to that original passion helps keep everything in perspective.

And finally—if you imagine the future of cooking and chefs in the next 10–20 years, what does it look like to you?

I believe the future will combine technology with tradition. Chefs will have access to incredible tools, innovations, and resources, but the heart of cooking will remain unchanged. People will always gather around a table to celebrate, connect, and create memories. The chefs who succeed will be those who embrace innovation while staying true to the human side of hospitality. At the end of the day, food is not just about feeding people—it is about making them feel something. That is what I believe will never change.





A CHEF'S COMPASS

A BRAZILIAN HEART, A PARISIAN HAND, A MOUNTAIN HOME



CHEF MARCO SILVA

<https://achefscompass.com/>





CHEF'S LIFE



Chef Dushantha Chamara

From a dream becoming a doctor to awarded chef



How do you feel? Do you feel like a successful and happy chef? Do you feel you are realizing your potential in your work?

When people see the awards or hear about the luxury brands I have worked with, they often think success came easily. The reality is very different. I started my career after missing my dream of going to university and becoming a doctor. At that time, I had no idea that the kitchen would become my life. My first salary was so small that my mother sometimes gave me money for transportation to work. I still remember those days clearly. Today, when I lead a team of chefs in the Maldives and look back on that journey, I feel proud and grateful. Success for me is not the medals on the wall. It is knowing that I never gave up when things were difficult. At the same time, I feel there is much more to achieve. Every new challenge teaches me something. That is why I still wake up excited to go to work after all these years.

Was there a period in your life when you wished you were doing something else?

Not really, although there was a time when life took me in a completely different direction. My parents wanted me to become a doctor, and I studied Biology with that goal in mind. When I did not achieve my university dream, I felt disappointed. Looking back now, it was probably one of the best things that ever happened to me.

Once I joined the hotel school and entered my first professional kitchen, I discovered a passion I never knew I had. The kitchen became my classroom, and every chef I worked with became a teacher. Of course, there have been difficult moments. Moving to the Maldives in 2012 was a huge challenge. I struggled with language barriers and had to adapt to a completely new environment. But those experiences helped shape me into the person I am today.





CHEF'S LIFE



You are an award-winning chef. Has this changed your feelings or the way you create dishes?

Does it make you feel more confident or more responsible?

Winning FHAM Best Chef 2023 was one of the proudest moments of my career.

I still remember standing there during the live cooking competition, knowing that every detail mattered. When my name was announced, I felt proud not only for myself but for everyone who had supported me throughout the journey. The award gave me confidence, but more importantly, it gave me responsibility. It reminded me that people now expect more from me. I need to continue learning, improving, and setting a positive example for younger chefs. Awards are wonderful, but they do not make you a better chef overnight. The next day, you still have to return to the kitchen and perform at the same high standard.

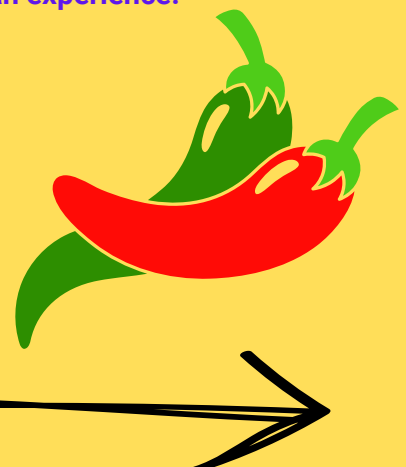
Do you have your own philosophy for creating a dish or menu?

My philosophy is simple: respect the ingredient and respect the guest. I enjoy fine dining because it allows chefs to express creativity, but creativity should never come at the expense of flavour. Guests may forget how a dish looked, but they will always remember how it tasted. My style combines Sri Lankan influences, French techniques, and modern culinary ideas. I enjoy taking familiar ingredients and presenting them in unexpected ways while still preserving their natural character. Every dish should tell a story. If a guest can remember that story after leaving the restaurant, then I believe the dish has done its job.

What inspires you in your work?

My biggest inspiration is my wife and Son. Many people see the medals and achievements, but they do not see the sacrifices behind them. There were years when I spent much of my annual leave preparing for competitions instead of taking holidays. They never complained. My wife and son always encouraged me to pursue my goals. I am also inspired by my team. Watching young chefs grow in confidence reminds me of my own journey when I first entered the industry.

Most of all, I am inspired by the guests. Seeing someone smile after tasting a dish that your team has worked hard to create is one of the best feelings a chef can experience.





CHEF'S LIFE



Many chefs feel burned out from time to time. Has this happened to you? If yes, how did you handle it?
Absolutely.

People often see the exciting side of being a chef, but they do not always see the long hours, the pressure, and the sacrifices that come with the profession. There have been periods in my career when I felt physically exhausted and mentally drained, especially during busy seasons and major projects.

What helped me was remembering why I started this journey in the first place. I also learned the importance of trusting my team. As a young chef, I felt I had to do everything myself. As I gained experience, I realized that strong teams achieve more than individuals.

Competitions also helped me stay motivated. Preparing for them gave me new goals and pushed me to keep learning. Outside the kitchen, I enjoy farming. It allows me to disconnect from the pressures of work and reconnect with nature. Sometimes the best way to recharge is to step away for a moment and return with a fresh perspective.

How do you see the future of culinary?

I believe the future of culinary will be shaped by two things: sustainability and authenticity.

Guests today want more than a good meal. They want to know where ingredients come from, how they are produced, and the story behind the food. They are looking for experiences, not just dishes.

At the same time, technology will continue to change the way kitchens operate. Modern equipment and digital systems can help chefs work more efficiently and consistently. However, I do not believe technology will ever replace creativity, passion, or hospitality. No matter how advanced our industry becomes, people will always remember how a meal made them feel. That human connection will remain the heart of great cooking.

What are your plans for the future?

I have always believed that growth should never stop. My immediate goal is to continue developing as a culinary leader and take on greater responsibilities within the hospitality industry. While I am proud to serve as a Sous Chef today, I am always looking toward the next challenge and the next opportunity to learn. One of my long-term dreams is to be part of a Michelin-level culinary project. It is something I have admired throughout my career and would love to experience first-hand.

At the same time, I want to continue mentoring young chefs and helping them achieve their own goals. Throughout my journey, many people invested their time and knowledge in me. I feel a responsibility to do the same for the next generation.





CHEF'S LIFE



What is your favourite food?

That is always a difficult question because I enjoy many different cuisines.

What excites me most is fine dining. I love the combination of creativity, technique, and storytelling that comes with it. A great fine dining experience is not just about eating; it is about creating memories. I am particularly fascinated by dishes that combine classic techniques with modern ideas. Molecular gastronomy, for example, allows chefs to surprise guests and challenge their expectations while still respecting the ingredient. As a chef, I enjoy discovering dishes that make me stop and think, "I wish I had created that." Those moments continue to inspire me and remind me why I fell in love with this profession.

What is your favourite food to cook? Anything else you would like to share?

Without hesitation, seafood. Having spent much of my career in island destinations such as the Maldives and Seychelles, I have developed a deep appreciation for fresh seafood and the endless possibilities it offers. Seafood allows chefs to be creative while still highlighting the natural beauty of the ingredient. I particularly enjoy combining fine dining techniques and rich French gastronomy with flavours and influences with my Sri Lankan heritage. Creating dishes that connect different cultures and experiences is something I find very rewarding. If there is one thing, I would like readers to take away from my story, it is that success rarely happens overnight. My journey began with a young man who missed his university dream and entered a hotel school without knowing where it would lead. Along the way there were challenges, sacrifices, and setbacks, but there were also incredible opportunities. Every achievement I have earned has been built on hard work, persistence, and the support of people who believed in me. My advice to young chefs is simple: stay curious, stay humble, and never stop learning. The journey is just as important as the destination.





Timeless Recipes with Craig "Burnie" Burns



Leptis Magna and the Taste of Empire: Food, Trade, and Power in Roman North Africa



On the coast of what is now Libya, facing the glittering expanse of the Mediterranean, the ancient city of Leptis Magna rose to extraordinary prominence as one of the Roman world's most impressive urban centers. Today it is remembered for its monumental ruins, elegant arches, sprawling forum, and sophisticated city planning. But beyond the grandeur of stone and empire, Leptis Magna also tells another story, one written in olive oil, wine, grain, fish sauce, and the flavors of elite Roman dining. To understand Leptis Magna is to understand how food moved through the Roman world, how wealth was displayed at the table, and how the Mediterranean was bound together not only by armies and roads, but by trade, appetite, and shared culinary culture. In many ways, the city was a living map of empire, and its cuisine reflected that reach. A dish such as Patina de Gallina cum Olivis, Roman chicken with olives, grapes, and herbs, offers a vivid glimpse into this world. It was more than a meal. It was a statement of status, access, and identity in one of North Africa's greatest Roman cities.



Leptis Magna began not as a Roman foundation, but as a Phoenician settlement. Established by maritime traders from the eastern Mediterranean, it was part of the broad network of coastal cities that linked North Africa to the commercial energies of the ancient Near East. This origin mattered deeply. From the beginning, Leptis Magna was shaped by exchange. It was a place where goods, peoples, languages, and ideas met. Long before its Roman flowering, it already stood within a tradition of Mediterranean commerce that valued ports, agricultural wealth, and strategic location. Over time, Leptis Magna came under the influence of Carthage and then Rome, and under Roman rule it expanded into one of the most dazzling cities in Africa Proconsularis. Its greatest age came in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries AD under Emperor Septimius Severus, who was himself born in Leptis Magna. His rise to imperial power transformed the city. Under his patronage, Leptis Magna was embellished with major public works, including a new forum, a basilica, a monumental arch, improved harbor structures, and other projects that projected both civic pride and imperial favor. The city became a showcase of Roman prosperity in Africa, a place where architecture declared loyalty to Rome while also celebrating local prestige.





Timeless Recipes with Craig "Burnie" Burns



Yet the city's beauty and importance were not based on imperial vanity alone. Leptis Magna thrived because it sat at the intersection of agricultural abundance and long-distance trade. North Africa was one of the great productive zones of the Roman Empire, especially valued for olive oil and grain. These staples were not merely local foods. They were strategic commodities that helped feed cities, armies, and provinces across the Mediterranean world. Olive oil in particular was central to Roman life, used not only for cooking but also for lighting, religious practice, bodily care, and commerce. Grain, similarly, was a foundation of imperial stability. A city that could produce, collect, and export these goods possessed both economic influence and political significance. Leptis Magna's importance lay partly in its ability to connect interior production with Mediterranean circulation. Agricultural goods from surrounding estates and fertile zones moved through its markets and harbor. Coastal shipping linked the city to other North African ports, Italy, Greece, Egypt, and beyond. Overland roads connected it to inland settlements, while wider caravan networks tied the coast to Saharan trade routes. In this sense, Leptis Magna was not an isolated Roman city at the edge of empire. It was a vital hinge between Africa and the wider Mediterranean system. Food sits at the center of this story because food was one of the clearest expressions of Roman power and interconnection. The Mediterranean was not only a sea of travel and war. It was also a sea of ingredients. Olives moved across regions in oil and brine. Wine traveled in amphorae. Grain crossed open water in vast quantities. Garum, the pungent fermented fish sauce beloved by Roman cooks, circulated as both everyday seasoning and luxury product, depending on its quality and origin. Fruits, herbs, pulses, spices, and preserved foods moved through imperial networks that connected urban households to distant ecologies. In Leptis Magna, the food culture of the city reflected both local abundance and imported refinement. The surrounding lands provided olives and grain, while the city's commercial status gave access to wine, preserved fish products, fruits, and seasonings from across the Roman world. Its cuisine therefore belonged to the broader Mediterranean tradition, but it also expressed the specific wealth of Roman Africa. This was a region that helped sustain the empire materially, and its cities demonstrated that prosperity in public buildings and private dining alike.

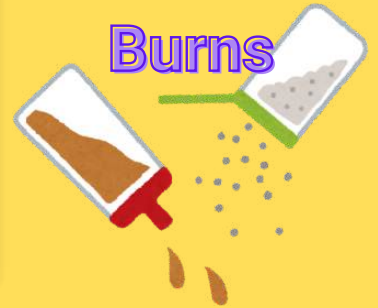


The Roman banquet, or *cena*, was not simply about nourishment. It was theater. It displayed hierarchy, taste, learning, and wealth. Elite households used meals to reinforce social status and political relationships. The arrangement of dishes, the rarity of ingredients, the complexity of preparation, and the interplay of flavors all signaled distinction. Roman taste often favored combinations that seem surprising to modern palates: sweet with savory, fruit with meat, herbs with fermented sauces, richness balanced by acidity. These combinations were deliberate. They expressed culinary sophistication and a taste for contrast.





Timeless Recipes with Craig "Burnie" Burns



This is where Patina de Gallina cum Olivis, Roman chicken with olives, grapes, and herbs, becomes especially revealing. In a city like Leptis Magna during the Severan age, such a dish would have suited the table of the wealthy, perhaps served in an elegant domestic setting during an evening banquet attended by officials, merchants, or members of the local elite. Chicken, while not the rarest of meats, was associated with domestic husbandry and controlled supply. Its presence in a composed dish signaled care and intention rather than rustic necessity. Olives connected the meal directly to the agricultural identity of North Africa and the wider Mediterranean basin. Grapes brought sweetness and luxury, recalling both fresh fruit and the wine culture that permeated Roman life. Herbs supplied aroma, balance, and medicinal undertones, while garum introduced the salty fermented depth that Roman cuisine prized. Together, these ingredients created a layered flavor profile that spoke to the Roman appetite for complexity. This was not a cuisine built on simplicity alone. It was a cuisine of contrast, one that delighted in blending rich, briny, sweet, and fragrant elements. In Leptis Magna, that complexity also mirrored the city itself. The dish brought together local produce and long-distance trade, domestic agriculture and imperial commerce, African land and Mediterranean sea. The significance of food in Leptis Magna extends beyond the dining room. Food was the engine of the city's economy and a marker of its place in Roman imperial geography. Olive oil and grain linked the city to the practical survival of the empire. At the same time, luxury foods and seasonings linked it to the cultural ideals of Roman civilization. To eat in Leptis Magna was to participate in a network that stretched across the Mediterranean, one in which provincial cities were not passive recipients of Roman culture but active contributors to it. Roman North Africa has often been overshadowed in popular imagination by Rome itself, or by more familiar centers like Pompeii, Alexandria, or Carthage. Yet cities such as Leptis Magna remind us that the empire's strength depended on regional hubs whose agricultural output, trade routes, and urban sophistication made imperial life possible. The Mediterranean was never a one-way system flowing outward from Italy. It was a dense, interdependent world in which North Africa played a decisive role. Leptis Magna eventually declined, especially after the wider crises of the 3rd century AD weakened the structures that had supported long-distance trade, urban investment, and imperial stability. Over time the city was reduced, abandoned, and partially buried by sand. But what remains today is extraordinary. Its ruins preserve not only architecture, but also the memory of a city that once stood at the heart of Mediterranean exchange.

To look at Leptis Magna through the lens of food history is to see more than monuments. It is to see olive groves feeding commerce, harbor traffic carrying amphorae, merchants negotiating value, cooks balancing flavors, and diners performing status through the foods on their plates.





Timeless Recipes with Craig "Burnie" Burns



A dish like Roman chicken with olives, grapes, and herbs becomes a small but powerful document of its age. It tells us that food was not secondary to empire. It was one of the ways empire was lived, tasted, displayed, and understood. In that sense, Leptis Magna was not only one of the best-preserved Roman cities in North Africa. It was also one of the clearest expressions of how the Mediterranean worked as a food world. Here, land, sea, trade, and table came together. Here, agriculture became wealth, wealth became architecture, and architecture framed a life in which the pleasures of the meal reflected the reach of the empire itself.



Patina de Gallina cum Olivis — Roman Chicken with Olives, Grapes, and Herbs

Ingredients

1000 grams (35.3 oz) chicken (*Gallus gallus domesticus*)
 40 grams (1.4 oz) green olives (*Olea europaea*)
 120 grams (4.2 oz) red grapes (*Vitis vinifera*)
 20 grams (0.7 oz) pine nuts (*Pinus pinea*)
 15 grams (0.5 oz) fresh parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)
 8 grams (0.3 oz) fresh mint (*Mentha spicata*)
 4 grams (0.14 oz) dried oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)
 4 grams (0.14 oz) ground black pepper (*Piper nigrum*)
 7 grams (0.25 oz) salt (NaCl)
 40 ml (1.4 fl oz) garum (fermented fish sauce)
 (waste product:
 various fish, modern equivalent: Asian fish
 sauce)
 200 ml (6.8 fl oz) white wine (*Vitis vinifera*)
 20 ml (0.7 fl oz) olive oil (*Olea europaea*)
 100 ml (3.4 fl oz) water (H_2O)
 15 ml (0.5 fl oz) white wine vinegar (*Acetum*,
 from *Vitis vinifera*)

Preparation Method

Pat the chicken pieces dry and set aside.
 In a deep pan, warm the olive oil over medium heat.
 Brown the chicken pieces on all sides until golden.
 Add the chopped parsley, mint, and oregano, stirring
 briefly to release their aroma.
 Add the green olives, grapes (halved), and pine nuts.
 Stir gently to combine.
 Pour in the white wine, water, garum, and vinegar.
 Scrape up any browned bits from the pan.
 Season with salt and black pepper. Cover partially and
 simmer gently for about 40 minutes, until the chicken
 is tender and infused with the sauce.
 Remove the chicken and keep warm. Increase heat,
 reducing the sauce to a slightly thick consistency.
 Return the chicken to the pan to glaze in the sauce for
 a minute. Transfer chicken and sauce to a broad
 serving platter.
 Garnish the dish with the reserved parsley and mint.
 Serve hot, accompanied by flat bread if desired.





MAGIC KITCHEN



José Luis Da Silva Alchemist of Gastronomy

Thinking back to your childhood—what was it like where you grew up? Did you always imagine yourself becoming a chef?

I grew up in an environment where food always held a special meaning, but to be honest, becoming a chef wasn't in my plans as a child. The kitchen was just that warm place for family gatherings, filled with aromas that embraced you when you came home; back then, I saw it as something natural, not a profession. The fascination with the culinary arts came later, when I understood that a dish could tell stories and evoke emotions without saying a single word. I discovered that cooking, in its purest essence, is an elegant way to connect with people.

There was a turning point where curiosity transformed into absolute passion; I realized there was nowhere else I wanted to be but in front of the stove, creating. At first, as happens in many families when you announce you're dedicating yourself to art or cooking, there was a bit of surprise and uncertainty, but their support didn't take long to arrive once they saw my determination. Back then, rather than obsessing over Michelin stars, my dream was to master classical technique—which led me to train with the rigor of French cuisine—and to travel. I wanted cooking to be my passport to see the world.



What kind of food or ingredients do you feel most connected to when you cook? Is there something that just feels like you on a plate?

I feel deeply connected to the versatility of fresh, local products and the rich heritage of Iberian and Latin American gastronomy. If anything defines my current style, it is the balance between high-end culinary technique and a sophisticated visual aesthetic. I am passionate about the play of textures and contrasts—for instance, working with vibrant reductions like a guava sauce or the noble simplicity of beautifully executed Andean potatoes. A dish that truly "feels like me" is one that looks impeccable, modern, and geometric to the eye, but when you take a bite, delivers a powerful, honest flavor that is deeply rooted in memory.





MAGIC KITCHEN



My journey has been an incredible voyage through different culinary cultures; my time working across France, Portugal, Brighton (England), and Venezuela stayed with me forever.

Especially during my training in Paris, the almost military discipline, the sacred respect for the product, and the pursuit of perfection in every single sauce gave me the structural foundation I rely on today. On the flip side, every restaurant opening or designing a major international tour really tests you. You face unfamiliar kitchens, cultural clashes, and the constant pressure to maintain your high standards. Those moments keep you awake at night, but they are exactly what polish you as a professional.

These days, food is everywhere—TV, Instagram, YouTube—and chefs are almost like celebrities. How do you feel about that? Do you think it helps the profession, or does it take something away from it?



It's a double-edged sword. On one hand, it's wonderful because it has elevated and brought dignity to the profession; people now understand the value, the effort, and the artistry behind a dish, and platforms like Instagram or TikTok allow us to connect directly with millions of people. On the other hand, the danger is that younger generations might chase quick fame before mastering the craft. Real cooking doesn't have lighting filters; it's heat, cuts on your hands, sweat, and hours on your feet. As long as we don't forget that the priority is always flavor and respect for the guest, this visibility will always be welcome.



What about you personally—what are you hoping for next? Any dreams, plans, or goals you're quietly working toward?

Personally, I am in a very beautiful moment of my career, currently leading a gastronomic tour across Europe, which has me absorbing a tremendous amount of inspiration. In parallel, I am focused on a project that brings me enormous excitement: developing the brand identity for my own culinary institute, "Alquimia" (Instituto Gastronómico de Artes Culinarias). It is my way of structuring and giving back everything I have learned, training future talents with a modern technical and business vision.





MAGIC KITCHEN



If a young chef just starting out came up to you and asked for one piece of advice, what would you tell them?

I would tell them not to rush for the fame or visual recognition that is so common today. True respect in this profession is earned by mastering the basics, understanding technique, and respecting the product. Cooking demands discipline, resilience, and a lot of humility to learn every single day. Build a solid foundation first; aesthetics and your own unique style will come naturally once your knowledge runs deep.

9o wrap things up, how do you define success in the kitchen today compared to when you first started?

In the beginning, you usually associate success with praise, awards, or the technical perfection of a dish. Today, my vision runs deeper. For me, success is the ability to transcend: seeing the happiness of a guest when they taste your food, inspiring your team, and leaving a lasting legacy through teaching. Success is no longer just about shining individually, but about igniting the passion for cooking in others.

Food has a unique power to connect people. What emotion or message do you ultimately want to leave on the palate of anyone who experiences your cuisine?

I want them to experience a deep sense of wonder and honesty. My cuisine is a bridge between my roots, my training, and the places that have shaped me. Beyond the technique or how visually stunning the presentation is, my ultimate goal is for the guest to feel the soul and respect behind every single ingredient. I want every bite to tell a story and leave a memory that lingers long after they have left the table. Ultimately, everything comes down to what I consider the most beautiful expression in gastronomy: "Enamorando paladares"—capturing hearts through the romance of flavor. . Beyond the stove, leadership and creativity are crucial. What role do other forms of art, like music, play in creating harmony within your kitchen?

Music is fundamental to that harmony and creativity. For me, service and the creative process in the kitchen are like a great symphony: you need rhythm, synchronicity, precise timing, and a deep connection between all elements. Music not only relieves the tension of a high-pressure environment, but it also stimulates the senses, flows with emotions, and helps us tune into the same creative frequency to continue "Enamorando paladares." Cooking with rhythm is cooking with soul.

Outside of the kitchen, you are known to be a passionate mountain biker. How does the adrenaline, discipline, and freedom of hitting the trails feed back into your creative energy as a chef?

For me, mountain biking and haute cuisine share the exact same DNA: both demand absolute concentration, technical precision in every single move, and unwavering discipline. When I am out on the trails, the adrenaline clears my mind, and the freedom of the natural environment completely recharges me. It is my space for meditation in motion. That exact mental freshness is what I later bring back to the kitchen, transforming the energy of the trails into pure creativity to continue.





From Chef to Author



Alex Fenot

Food. Restaurant life... and all bullshit in between

Alex, you created the Foodbullshit project because, as you said, "I was tired of the fake version of the industry." What exactly did you mean by that? Do you think that content that isn't polished for Instagram can still attract followers and an audience?

Ahh, social media. My favorite topic. First, allow me to thank you for this interview and for the opportunity to speak to your readers. Well, in order to understand my view about all this and the reason why I created Foodbullshit, you need to understand where I come from, and keep in mind I was born in France, in Paris, in the 70s. Yeah, I know; my daughter still has a hard time wrapping her head around this. Like I come from an ancient civilization. The thing is, she's not totally wrong.

Back then life, inside, outside, and around a restaurant was very different. Simple. A phone was just a device to make some calls.

Restaurants were places you could eat. And food was just... well... food. I started working in the early 90s in France. I started as a server, then I made my way to GM. Then I switched to the kitchen, from line cook to executive chef. So during those 30+ years, I saw the evolution of this industry, whether in the dining room or the kitchen on both sides of the Atlantic. The evolution of management and service, but also the way our relationship to food and, ultimately, the guests and their tastes changed.



Then came social media, and it started getting weird because it brought to the table two notions that changed everything in hospitality. Illusion and entitlement. The illusion that this job was easy, that it was for everyone, that anybody could succeed in it. The illusion that anybody could be a food critic—I won't even start talking about the craziness of online reviews—and that everyone understands restaurants because they've eaten in one. And this is where it hurt us the most: the illusion of competence. It created an entire ecosystem of consultants, strategists, influencers, marketers, photographers, and self-proclaimed experts who believe they are qualified to tell chefs and restaurateurs how to run their businesses from the comfort of their offices. Everyone is an expert.





From
Chef
to
Author

For me, LinkedIn is probably the worst and perfect example of this phenomenon. Spend some time reading posts and articles and you'll notice they all sound the same. The same values. The same vocabulary. The same polished, sanitized tone. The same beautiful stories by the same carefully crafted personalities who like to think of themselves as a brand. They all say the same thing because it's convenient. What makes their case even more indefensible is that many of them can't even write it on their own anymore. They use AI. But AI is not the problem. AI just makes it worse. Instead of using it to challenge their ideas, explore different points of view, or expose themselves to contradictory opinions, they use it to reinforce the same platitudes; just package it in a prettier way. Everyone presents themselves on their best day, with their best profile, and their best version of reality. You could spend days scrolling without finding a single opinion that truly challenges the mainstream narrative. Nobody wants to be disruptive. Nobody wants to risk saying something unpopular. And if you do? "You're toxic."

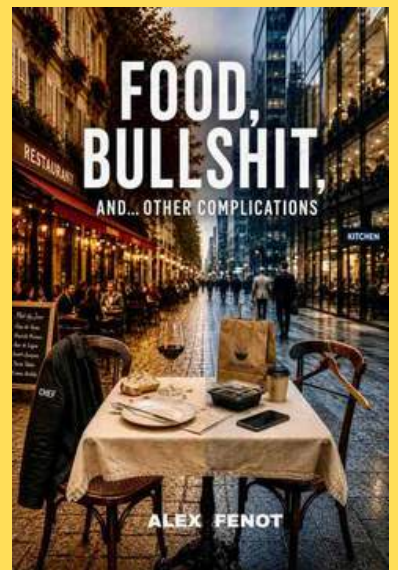
"No, I just disagree with you." You remember, can we just agree to disagree? Gone. Everyone wants to belong to the herd. That desire to fit the mold, to remain consensual at all costs, fascinates me. It's the only thing I think is interesting.

Otherwise it's boring. Then there is entitlement.

Entitlement, because it creates the notion that because you have an opinion, it automatically matters and it deserves to be heard and shared. It's a good thing that social media gave some people a microphone, but let's be honest and blunt: Not everyone has something clever, pertinent, original, or intelligent to say. If it's for repeating and blabbering the same thing as everybody else, what's the point?

Then it's a monologue, not a conversation.

You see it in restaurants as well. Some kid somewhere decided he wanted to be a chef, but once he or she discovered, two weeks later, the reality of the job: it's difficult; there is pressure, discipline, criticism, long hours, exhaustion, the heat, the cuts, the burns, and the noise. And the chef isn't always nice. Oh, I forgot the biggest argument: nobody cares what you think or have to say; just do what you're told. Suddenly they conclude that the industry is broken because the chef is unfair, the job is toxic, and the industry is the problem. Every uncomfortable truth or criticism becomes unbearable. Hospitality has many flaws. It is not perfect. Far from it. But why are we hiding the truth? Why the systematic denial? Yes, the job is hard, so what? Hardship and injustice are not always the same thing.





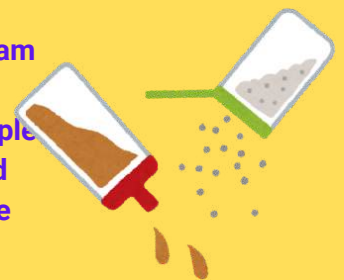
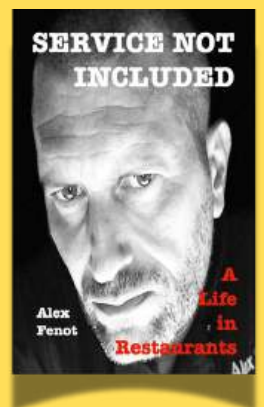
From
Chef
to
Author

So all this created a sort of haze that distorted the reality of the profession. Giving the perception that the job appears easier than it is. Anybody can do it, and everyone can succeed in it; everybody wants to be the new chef influencer, to have a show on TV or a YouTube channel. That was the idea behind Foodbullshit. Not to preach and just to shout louder than others, I wasn't looking for followers; it's not a cult. I am not an influencer. And trust me, we don't need another hospitality guru. I just write and publish articles and books, and whoever wants to read them can read them. I am not imposing my views on anyone. Feel free to have a look and, after, make up your mind.

I am not recognizing my job anymore. And it hurts me. So I use the only tools I have at my disposal: my website, the blog, and the books. Ironically, social media was a big help as well. See, I am not saying everything is bad. But something had to be said because I am tired of seeing kids quitting because they were sold a different reality on social media. Self-entitled experts who give lectures and crush guys with years of experience, telling them they are wrong or irrelevant because they don't fit the narrative; they are not hip. I wanted one place where I could say out loud what I hear so many hospitality professionals saying privately. We all agree on it, but no one will take the risk to say it publicly because they're afraid of being judged, cancelled, or considered difficult to work with within their own companies or on social media; everyone fears being fired or being considered disruptive. Me, I don't care. I have nothing to lose; if I have something to say, I say it. If you like it, good; if you don't, scroll along.

Regarding your second question, do I think that content that isn't polished for Instagram can still attract followers and an audience? In Miami? No, I don't think so. In New York, Los Angeles, Paris, London, and many other cities, yes. You still find people interested in neighborhood restaurants. Corner bistros. Places with good food, good service, and a sense of community. Places where the guest knows the server's name and the server knows the entire family. But in Miami, this city is too superficial, too attached to glitz and appearances, to remain satisfied with a traditional and conservative approach to restaurants. It's mostly a party town now. Las Vegas by the beach. It works both ways; try to run a restaurant without Instagram.

Look at all the landmark restaurants that have closed for the past 5 years. Mostly regular restaurants, without music blasting through the speakers, and no one is dancing on the table at midnight. And the star of the show was on the plate, not behind a DJ booth.





From
Chef
to
Author

After all, it looks like it's what Miami's crowd wants. So why not? If it works, I am cool with that, but don't ask me to like it, to say it's good because it's successful, to have dinner there, and most importantly, to work there. But if you're asking whether a conservative chef who owns his restaurant and cooks his meals behind his stove can compete with flashy dining rooms, influencers, DJs, and visually engineered content, then no, That game is over. I think that's one of the reasons so many people around my age eventually leave Miami. They move to Fort Lauderdale, further north, or to the west coast of Florida. I've watched many Europeans in hospitality leave Florida altogether.

When you say, "The truth is, all of this is bullshit," what message are you trying to send to the world about the restaurant industry?

I am not sending a message; I don't have that pretension. And to be perfectly honest, at the speed things are going, we're closer to the message in a bottle. Hospitality as people from my generation knew it will soon be tales of an ancient time that culinary veterans will share with rookies, like old pirates swapping stories about the good old days. Because I have no illusions, I won't stop anything. And I don't want to. I am just observing the changes. When you think about it, the new generation who are working in hospitality don't seem to be bothered by all this. Quite the opposite, they seem to like it. The system adapted to them, if I may say. The problem is, in the process, chefs and general managers from my generation are caught in the crossfire. So for us for sure it's disorienting because we see things changing so rapidly and we have the feeling we don't belong there anymore. And sadly it is not a feeling; it's the harsh reality.

But I would say if there were one thing to keep from my work, I am just a passerby who tells a story. And try at my small level to raise a flag saying be careful what you wish for. This is how it was and how it is today, but if you continue in this direction, this or that might happen. The fact that I have a big mouth and the absence of self-preservation to do it publicly in these modern days proves my point about what this job was and the kind of misfits that you could meet in it. It cost me already. I never learned to shut up; I never could and never will. The only thing that worries me is that I meet young cooks who are like that, with strong personalities, who are original and creative, and who have that spark in their bellies.

What's their future in this hospitality industry if they don't blend in? To tone it down or just refuse to fit in?

They will need luck to meet either a chef or a restaurant owner who understands and believes in them, because, if you expect HR to understand them, to support them, or to hire them. You are dreaming; they will systematically put the resume of these kids at the bottom of the pile. As they always did for me or others and still do. The only difference is, at the time, HR was not as rigid, standardized, and sanitized as it is today. And we met for interviews with real people, the GM, the chef, and the owner. They did the screening. Not HR. So some took us for lunatics, but others saw something in us they liked. We were given the opportunity because it was still a job of humans, handled by humans for humans. Now it's one size fits all. The first head that sticks out is the first one to be chopped and silenced. It's sad; we should encourage rebellion, originality, and creativity, especially in a job that demands so much of us.





From Chef to Author

The only thing that really worries me is that I read an article the other day saying that about 50% of chefs or GMs who are in the range of 45/50 years old are pushed on the side. So either they do something else because they can't find a position, or they move out of Miami or out of state. It's a tremendous source of experience that owners and HR, again, are neglecting. I, like many, have been saying for a while that hospitality in Miami is in crisis. Time will tell.

You have extensive experience working in different kitchens. How do they differ from one another?

What are the main differences between working as a chef in Europe and in the United States?

Well, I got lucky. I didn't go to culinary school. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying it's a bad thing or that it's useless; quite the opposite, it teaches the basics. But in my case and others, we got the privilege to be taught by chefs who were possessed by their crafts. Unhinged, old school, down to earth. They taught us to keep an open mind and to be curious. They showed us a few tricks, but mostly what helped us the most is that at the same time they were ruthless bastards. They made it clear very quickly what this job was about, resisting pressure and keeping going no matter what. And if you wanted a future in it. You had to stick with the program and learn from your mistakes quickly.

And keep a low profile until someone asks for your opinion or gives you a section or a special to do.

And I kept this approach. In all the places I worked, whether FOH or BOH.

Except for the low-profile thing; I always had a problem with that.

If we are honest about the job, the equation is simple: you, a craft, a team, and customers. The only things that change are cities, ingredients, and types of cuisine. And the environment. This is where being a chef in Europe differs from the US. The environment. The way we were trained gives us the ability to adapt everywhere. Trust me, it was not always fun; it was rough and challenging, but at the end of it, we could basically work anywhere. Even if we didn't speak the language, we'd find our way in the kitchen or in a dining room. For a very simple reason, there was one rule: either keep up or get out. A French kitchen, or a dining room, as a matter of fact, is not hostile, but it's not friendly either. And it never will be. Especially in Paris You're not there to make friends. So whether you get along with your coworkers, nobody cares. It's not a social club. You work here. You don't have to be nice; the only thing that matters are that the job gets done. I've met Americans who went to work in France; some came back and said we are completely nuts, and others loved it and stayed there or came back but keep on working that way. But that was 10 years ago.





From
Chef
to
Author

Today Today, I don't think the younger generation of Americans would accept it. Maybe it's a good thing; I don't know. The only thing I know is in France, if you want to work in a restaurant dining room or kitchen, it won't be a walk in the park. You better know what you're stepping into. Otherwise, there are plenty of differences; HR is one. Yeah, I know I have a thing for HR. Since day one. But in France, it's more a department that handles problems and resolves issues but hiring and interviews are done by management. and a lot of jobs don't exist in hospitality in France. For a start, consultants are not very popular in the restaurant industry. Executive chef, corporate chef, head chef, CDC. All this we don't have. We have one chef in the kitchen. One sous chef, one pastry chef, and the rest are line cooks. Period We change the menu four times a year. It follows seasons. And the biggest difference? Customers...

They are not as picky; they are not very sensitive to food trends and don't have identity crises. You have the carnivores and the vegetarians. The no-gluten, vegan, or other specific diets are a niche. The reason is, for French people, food is emotional, not an ideological statement. For every mood and problem, there is a solution, and the solution is a meal. Everything turns around the table. So we go to a restaurant the same way here; some go to church or to see a shrink. That's the biggest difference. You see it the way we manage a restaurant. It might be very strict, but at the same time it's very casual and old school. It's not corporate; that's the word I was looking for. Because to respond to those emotions. We need to understand them, to feel them.

Did the pressure of working in professional kitchens inspire you to start writing books, or did it push you to seek another way of expressing yourself? Oh boy, the million-dollar question. Well, not directly. I never had a problem with the pressure inside the restaurant or the lifestyle. The hours, the fact that you work when everyone else isn't, etc. It's probably one of the reasons I chose this path. It's chaotic, and I thrive in it. But I could never picture myself working in an office; I'd go crazy. Too quiet, too polished, too organized.

My wife was in the industry for a very long time, so she knows the drill. And she knows if I did something else, I would be even more unbearable for others. The thing is, I come from a wealthy family in France. Wealthy but dysfunctional. My father abandoned me when I was eight, and I only saw him again 38 years later. My stepdad raised me, and my mother watched. So during adolescence I developed some issues that were unsolved and resurfaced later when I was a model; then came drug abuse and alcoholism. Then I dropped out of modeling because I was destroying myself so badly the end was predictable. So as I said in my first book, for me, I was not looking for a job. I was looking for a substitute family, a refuge. And I found it, the restaurant life. It was much later, when I met my wife, that I was able to resolve some of my problems and stop being angry at everything. Still, I continued taking drugs and drinking like a maniac until I was 40 and I became a chef. Then I took a 180-degree turn. I left my GM position and switched to the kitchen. I started from the bottom again. And my life changed radically. I found purpose, dignity, and pride. My path is unusual: model at 20, GM at 30, and chef at 40. I was blessed because I found my passion, and I was good at it; it was like second nature. So when I calmed down, I thought,

—Well, I am going to write to my kid so she can understand who I am and where I come from, and then chapter after chapter it shaped into something else.





A therapy without the shrink.

But at one point I told myself, "Ok, maybe there are others like me, so let's publish it." Just in case it might help somebody who is stuck in the same hole I was. The second one is different, very different, and not as self-centered as the first one. It's not an egotistical trip into my past or my anger or my life. It's a reflection on who we are and what we are becoming through the lens of our food habits. It defines us. Because I have the feeling that the more tools we have that simplify our lives, the more we complicate the simple things, and food is usually our favorite victim.

So I am talking about food, all the bullshit we piled on it, fear, foam, and panic. And...other complications: life, culture, technology, and many other things. Hence the title.

It's a love letter to food, old recipes, restaurants, and to both countries that made me. I am French. I was born in Paris to a family who owned restaurants and were chefs, but the irony is that it was my trip to New York when I was 18 that was the spark that made me fall in love with this job. And the person responsible for my presence in a kitchen is American. It's Anthony Bourdain. Go figure. I know it may sound cliché, but I encourage anyone who has not read "Kitchen Confidential" to do it. Because let me tell you, when you are young and you are not sure about your future and you read this, the only thing that pops in your mind is, "Where do I sign?" So I've spent 20 years here; I thought it would be fun to give you the point of view of a French chef on your food, what separates us, what we agree on, and what brings us together. My State of the Union culinary edition. Again, a little arrogant on my part. But I found out that writing is very soothing if it helps you channel your anger or your frustration and forces you to express them in a civilized way. Then you get to think about them, and you analyze and understand them. Very rewarding.

Do you believe restaurant guests should know what happens behind the scenes, or is your work aimed mainly at culinary professionals?

Well, to be blunt, I am not sure. It depends on your definition of "behind the scenes." Because it's only to give an edited and sanitized version of what's really going on, what's the point? In kitchens we always say if we wrote a book, nobody would believe us. Then when somebody writes a book about kitchens, all the nonsense and the ugly truth disappear. And we end up with a beautiful story in a beautiful restaurant about beautiful people who serve and cook beautiful food for beautiful customers. Who gives a crap? Do you want to read that story? I don't. It reminds me of when I started to write. My wife told me you can't talk about your drug problems or your alcoholism. You can't say what really happens in a kitchen or in a restaurant? You're going to get burned. Nobody will hire you after that. Well, first that would mean that enough people would have read it, so maybe finding another job would not be my priority. But even if? Why should I care? If I have in front of me somebody dumb enough to judge me on what I was or what I did instead of what I can bring to his restaurant, then I wouldn't want to work with or for that person.

The problem of our society again is appearances. Why are people so afraid of what other people think? It happened. Is it happening? Why not tell the truth? Being scared is the best shortcut for doing nothing and never being wrong. For example, I love music, I play guitar, and I am a music freak.





From
Chef
to
Author

I love to read biographies of musicians or how this album was made or how this song was created and recorded, but only if it's not romanticized. I just read "Life" by Keith Richards for the third time. His autobiography is a delight to read; it's funny and unapologetic in the way he is. Pure rock 'n' roll. I think people are curious about what they don't see. And to be fair life in a restaurant is everything but boring. We all have stories for years, not all fun; some are pathetically sad. Once, I found one of my cooks in the bathroom of the restaurant, overdosing on heroin in the middle of the service with a full dining room. The struggle to bring him back lasted for 20 minutes; it was the longest 20 minutes of my life. I will always remember it. I saved him. That time. He died six months after, from another heroin overdose on another job. I mean, yes, if you want to tell a story, say it, but don't sugarcoat. I think people like honesty, even if sometimes it hurts or is ugly. But I think it's a good thing that the people have an idea of what this job really is. What it does to us and how we survive through it. Nobody can understand how a rush at 9 pm on a Saturday night feels until you're behind the pass. The fatigue, the stress, the loneliness. So I guess to be fair it's 60 / 40. Sixty for the guests and 40 for the industry and for the ones who are thinking about this path. Most people have no idea how hard it is to work in a restaurant. Not only when you are a chef or a GM, but also for a server, a bartender, a hostess, or a dishwasher. So I wanted to shed some light on these beautiful maniacs and lunatics I have met for 30 years in the industry. And to be honest, having the guilty pleasure of telling the truth about what we say about the guests behind the kitchen doors gave me goosebumps.



Who is Alex outside of his work? How did you first find yourself in a professional kitchen? I am the exact same person at work and at home. Stubborn, passionate, and kind but not very friendly, I have the same social skills as an oyster. But I am fair and honest with people—brutally honest; my wife would tell you it's too much. I don't have any filter whatsoever. So you can guess that in this era of political correctness, where we walk on eggshells and tiptoe through our conversations and choose our words carefully, well, people can be surprised. Some might confuse it with arrogance; I am not. I just say it like it is. But I am loyal to the craft and to my team; I will defend them and stand up for them even if it costs me my job. They are like family to me; I always thought of them like my kids. You train them, educate them, support them, and trust them, and one day, if you did a good job, well, they fly on their own and leave the nest. I had the same team for 7 years in 3 different restaurants. So I guess I am not such an ass. I tried to make them better cooks; they repaid me by making me a better person. Yeah, I forgot I am sentimental too; go figure. But I do have a problem with authority, always have.





From
Chef
to
Author

Other than that, I am a simple person. As I said in the book, I like simple things, simple people, simple meals, and simple wines. I like playing guitar and cooking. My only real problem is the only places I am the most comfortable and happy are at home with my wife, my daughter, my dogs, and my guitars. Or in a restaurant kitchen.

Everything in between, I try not to hang around too long; it's just a transit zone. I'm not comfortable in society. Regarding the first time I was in a professional kitchen, I think I was about 20 years old. My best friend David was married to Michel Rostang's daughter. At the time he was considered one of the best chefs in the world; he had 2 Michelin stars, if I remember correctly. So from time to time we stopped by the restaurant to say hi. As soon as I entered the kitchen, I felt a little like a kid in a toy store. I was watching everything, smelling everything, and I talked to the cooks, asking hundreds of questions. And I loved spending time with Mr. Rostang. We had dinner with him from time to time, or we spent weekends in the family residence at La Baule, a beach town on the west coast of France. I think it's probably one of the people that had the biggest influence on my life. My only regret is I never had the chance to tell him and thank him. He probably never knew. I hope he'd be proud of the path I chose. Because I was a bit of a lost cause at the time. This man was the closest thing to a father figure I had. Even though both of us were not aware of it. So, if you add up my real father having restaurants. My Italian grandmother, who was spending 90% of the time in the kitchen cooking, and both of my uncles being chefs. With my best friend, who was in the restaurant industry and has several restaurants in Paris, Mr. Rostang; my in-laws having a restaurant; and my wife being in the industry as well, I guess my fate was sealed from the very beginning. It was written.



Are you currently working in a professional kitchen?

No. I stopped working mid-December. I was executive chef in a French/Mediterranean/Middle Eastern restaurant. The place was beautiful, and the owners were great people, but unfortunately, we found ourselves in a niche, and they faced the same problems all independent owners face in Miami. The restaurant closed; I was laid off.



It's the typical David vs. Goliath story. How can you compete with the amount of cash those big groups have? Visibly on social media, PR, and budget to invite influencers. Financially you have to be careful about anything, staff, suppliers, and food costs; the smallest event will have severe repercussions. The weather, holidays, high rents, and let's not forget how brutal summer can be. But for me, the most important thing is we need to be realistic. This is why I said earlier there is a crisis in hospitality in Miami. There are too many restaurants. I give numbers in my first book: about a 60% increase in the past 5 years. The population of Miami increased as well, but still, competition is fierce because they'll have to share the same customers. We have reached saturation. So all these have repercussions; as soon as a restaurant struggles, they lay off staff.





From Chef to Author

The problem is here: One food trend chases the other; they pile up, plus as food becomes an ideological statement, the demands for special meals have become overwhelming: no gluten, keto, vegan, flexitarian, vegetarian, or pescatarian. I don't mind you eating what you want; I don't care. But the problem is because of the competition, chefs and owners put a little bit of everything on the menu; it has no identity anymore, and they end up all the same. So when one goes down, they all follow. But what about the staff? I won't bore you with numbers. But have a look at the increase of the cost of living in Miami for the past 5 years. Then compare it to the increase of salary.

What happens in the end? The experienced cooks are leaving Miami because living here is too expensive, and we are left with an underqualified workforce. Owners are happy because they pay them less; ultimately, with time, it brings wages down. Everyone suffers. Owner, staff, and guests. We're all in the same boat. So back to what I was saying, they closed in December after 2 years. They fought like hell, but at one point they could not take it anymore; they were drained.

So I took some time off. I finished the second book, played guitar, and spent some time with my family. Then eventually I went back on the market. That was a hell of a shock. But I was warned; some friends of mine told me you'll see the market has changed. Spanish is mandatory or preferred; no interest in a senior chef, too expensive, too experienced, too this, or too that. I got rejection after rejection.

Until one day I got an interview. Finally. Then I got a phone call from a recruitment agency. I quote: "Please stay on the line for your interview. Welcome, I am.... Your virtual recruiter, please talk to me about your experience." I hung up the phone, and I said to myself, "That's it." I am done.

So since then I have not applied anywhere. No, I am lying. I am going to tell a secret. Well, I shouldn't say it, but what the hell. I still send 2 or 3 résumés out to companies every week just for fun or to give myself a clear conscience and to prove a point to my wife about why we need to move. I know exactly what I am going to receive in return. And the kick for me is that I derive a sadistic pleasure from reading those rejection emails afterward. I got used to it. It has become a routine.

I have friends here and there who keep me in the loop of what's going on, but so far, I am sort of dormant. I'm not actively looking; I am evaluating my options. We have talked about moving out of state. Maybe California; my wife loves LA; she used to live in San Diego for 15 years.

Or maybe back to France. We are thinking.

What do you think about projects and initiatives that support burned-out chefs and hospitality professionals?

If it helps people, why not? I can't be against something that allows, finally, people to understand and make public the difficulties and the challenges of this industry. Plus, it allowed cleaning the stables of toxic management. It's a plus. The fact that more women now are interested in working in kitchens and feel comfortable doing so. It's great. They brought a delicate touch, some sensitivity in a world dominated by testosterone. It's good. I love it.





From
Chef
to
Author



But I am biased. As I told you, this industry saved my life. Because of its roughness, the rigor, and the pressure, it gave me structure. So I am not necessarily the best person to judge those projects. The only thing I've noticed is that it might feed the sentiment of victimization. Those projects don't bother me, quite the opposite, but it forces me to ask the question: "Why didn't we have it before?"

Why now? What changed? Is this a need? Does it respond to a general concern? If it serves the purpose of removing the hardship of the job to make it friendly, compatible with kindness, and well-being? Feng shui? There I have a problem. This job has never been easy; it is not and never will be. It's demanding, challenging, and rough; you sacrifice a lot. But it's the nature of the game. You can't change it. You can make it more bearable here and there, but rationalizing the concept that urgency, challenge, hardship, repetition, and exhaustion make you a victim is not helpful. Sorry, I don't agree. I understand that it's not for everyone. If you don't like it, then do something else. Why nowadays do we have to adapt everything to us... me? Me. Me. We have to adopt it, not the other way around. This job was there before us; it will be there long after we're gone. Why do we have to remove its nature, the essence of everything, and make it compatible with us? Is being a cop easier now than before? I don't think so. Is being a farmer easier now? The tools helped, but it's a rough job.

So why would working in a kitchen be different? We have tools that simplify your life; it's great. But the game remains the same. Pressure, heat, noise, urgency. You want to tell a customer he's going to wait for his main course because you feel that the chef is unfair because he's telling you to hurry the fuck up? You will tell the hostess not to sit too many people at the same time because it disrupts your timing; you can't debone a chicken or gut a fish because it hurts your sensitivity. I am sorry I may sound harsh, but if this job is not for you, then do something else; quit. Period. You are wasting your time, mine, the time of your coworkers and the guests'.

What is your favorite food? And what is your favorite dish to cook?

French food, obviously. Italian comes in second because of my grandmother. And It's the first cuisine I've learned to cook. At 8 years old, I knew how to dice an onion and mince garlic before I knew how to ride a bike. Favorite dish? Oh boy, I don't know; there are so many. Well, I can't pick one specifically, but what I enjoy the most are the dishes that take time. The ones that simmer. When you spend 2, 3, or 4 hours with them, you prepare them, you cook, you keep an eye on them, and you go through the change of texture and smells. A pâté, a beef bourguignon, a short rib, a lamb shank, and a duck confit.

A potato gratin, a veal blanquette, a coq au vin, an osso buco, and a lasagna.

Meals like that. And for a specific reason as well because when it's done, you put the dish in the middle of the table, and everyone digs into it. That's the core of this business, sharing.





From
Chef
to
Author

What do you think the future holds for restaurants and the culinary industry in general?

Wow, I have no clue. I am not a prophet, and I won't have the pretension of giving anything that resembles an affirmation. We will see, I guess. And we will adapt. Or not. Then we will change again the nature of the job till the day we can't, and then who knows? Maybe it will come back to what it used to be. The cycle of life. Plus, with AI, robotics, new equipment, and all those things, it goes so fast. It's really impossible to predict anything. There are two things I am sure of.

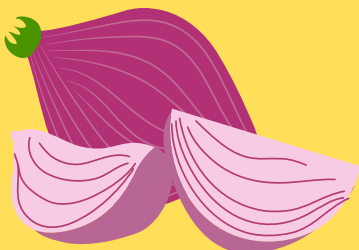
Number one: The French, regarding food no matter the generation, always go back to the classics. Number two, that's why we will always need guys like me, stubbornly cooking, entrenched behind their stoves, reviving old recipes in some small corner dive in a local neighborhood The rest? We figure out soon enough, I think.

Is being a chef still a good career choice in today's world? What does being a great chef mean to you?

For me it's the greatest job in the world, this and being a musician Actually, being in a brigade and being in a rock band are very similar. In the first book I compare both. Both jobs are quite the same experience: rehearsals and prep, playing live and the service, making the menu like an album, etc. But I will never discourage a kid who wants to do this. The only thing I'd tell him is to be very aware of what this choice means for his life. But at the same time I would tell him the plus sides The brotherhood Giving pleasure to people by cooking with your skills and your talent is quite something. You can't cheat! If you suck, you won't be able to hide behind a pan very long.

But the biggest thing is you don't have to work in fine dining to be proud of what you do. It's one of the rare jobs where you can achieve something great at your own level; you can touch the grail even if you work in a small place, a diner, or any other place. If you have a good sandwich, a good soup, or a good special and a customer tells you, "I loved it." That's it, job done. You made your day.

And what is a great chef? I don't know. Ask the guys who have Michelin stars. I never wanted to be a great chef. I wanted to be a good chef, honest, and reliable. But if I wanted to complicate things, I'd ask a good chef for whom? Yourself? The owner? The guest? Your team? I guess a good chef is someone who loves what he does and does it the best he can. It's not more complicated than that. Personally, I drew the line very early. Whatever I send, it may be fancy or something very simple; I refuse to send shit. And my staff knew it. I prefer they redo it; I don't care. I'll take the delay; blame me fine. I can go to the table. I respect my job, the customer, and the guy who pays me. After, it's just me.





From
Chef
to
Author

Looking back, if you knew then what you know now about the industry, would you still choose to become a chef?

YES. Without a second of hesitation. I would probably go even faster and earlier. This job changes you in every way possible, some days not always for the best, but for the most part. What a life it is. Think about it: you can travel. I worked in London, Paris, St. Barts, and Miami. You work in incredible restaurants. You are paid to cook. You are surrounded by food and mental cases that are as degenerated as you are. Misfits with broken lives, wild imagination, and crooked dreams. Idealists like you. You spend your days creating recipes and playing with ingredients and flavors. People come to eat what you do for a living. They come to see you; they rely on you to have a good time. When you think about it, what's not to like? As I was telling you, it's the life of a rock star but without all the nuisances. You can go to see a movie, go to a supermarket, get drunk, or party. Live. Normal life. So yes, I would do exactly the same. I would still take the time to evolve in the dining room; being a server and a GM made me a better chef. Because when I talk with the GM, I can understand his point of view; I get what he wants and what he needs from me. Been there, done that. I remember in my early days in Paris it was kitchen vs. dining room. They never ate together or talked to each other. Being on both sides helps me understand what needs to be done to make both entities work toward one goal. I always ask servers, at least once, to spend some time with me in the kitchen during a busy service so they understand what we go through. At the same time, I demand that my cooks blend in with the dining room staff to exchange points of view. So they understand what they go through because nowadays it's not that simple to be a waiter. They're not just order takers, and cooks need to understand that. Sometimes they can make the mistake of thinking they are the ones with a craft. Brother, you can be the best cook in the world if there is no one to sell your dish or to bring it to a guest. Then you're screwed. Same thing for dishwashers; I always take care of them. I treat them like royalty. When it's time for staff meal, everyone knows my orders. Nobody touches the food before the dishwashers have their plates. Why? Nine times out of ten they show up, and there is nothing left. Not in my kitchen. And the first one who disrespects a dishwasher, I don't even waste my time arguing; he's out. Think about this: servers, bartenders, cooks, chefs, and GMs. What do we do without a dishwasher? Nothing. No plates, no silverware, no glasses, no pots, no pans, nothing. You can close your restaurant.

Do you have a dream? A goal that you're still working toward?

Goals? I've had plenty of them. I've reached some. Others I did not, but I moved on. As I go through life, I set new ones. I try to keep up. Dreams? Yes, I have two. To play live with Rockin'1000. It's a band that performs in front of thousands of people and tours Europe and the US. The setlist is usually made up of rock classics. I passed the audition and was selected. I was supposed to be part of the band in January at the Caesars Superdome in New Orleans, but something came up and I had to cancel. It made me sick. My place on the guitar side is confirmed for another concert, but I need to find the right city and the right date. Playing guitar live in a stadium is a dream





From
Chef
to
Author

The other one?

A restaurant. But something small: a tiny kitchen and a small dining room, like a neighborhood bistro. Something cozy and friendly, on a quiet street. Maybe a terrace. No menu, just a board that changes once a week or whenever something is 86' d. Traditional cuisine with seasonal products, something simple but that rings true, like an acoustic guitar, to stay with the music metaphor. Guests come for a drink and a bite after work, while others stop because they saw the neighbor enjoying a glass of wine and a cheese plate or a cured meat platter on the terrace. A family from the building next door comes in for dinner because they don't want to cook but still want to spend some time together around a good meal. I have no clue where, but that's the image I have in my mind. A place where people talk to each other, smile, feast, and drink wine from small vineyards. Basically, the corner joint where everyone knows each other and calls me Alex. Nothing fancy, just affordable and honest. Me, in the kitchen with a young cook who's curious and eager to learn, passing on a few tricks, the things I've picked up over the years, and everything experience has taught me. That's how the craft lives on. That will do it for me. I like simple things. Simple meals, simple wines, simple people. And to quote Guy Savoy, one of the best chefs in the world, whom I worked for when I was much younger, he told me once: "Kid, simplicity is the most difficult thing to achieve in a kitchen. But it's the ultimate quest."



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RECIPES



Savory Beef Medallions with Mushroom Gravy

Recipe by Chef Benjamin Chika Nwoke

This recipe for Savory Beef Medallions with Mushroom Gravy is wonderfully tender, full of flavor, and oh-so-easy to make. It's a dish that's sure to bring smiles all around the table!



What you'll need:

- 1 pound sirloin steak or tenderloin, trimmed of excess fat and cut into 1-inch thick medallions
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 pound cremini mushrooms, sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cups low-sodium beef broth
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour (or a gluten-free alternative like cornstarch)
- 1/4 cup milk (any kind you prefer)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Fresh parsley, chopped (for garnish, optional)

Serve these gorgeous beef medallions hot, generously topped with the rich mushroom gravy. A sprinkle of fresh parsley adds a lovely touch of color and freshness. This dish pairs wonderfully with mashed potatoes, steamed green beans, or your favorite roasted vegetables.

Enjoy every tender, flavorful bite! We hope this recipe brings a little extra joy to your kitchen. Let us know how it turns out in the comments below! Happy cooking!

Let's get cooking!
Prepare the Beef: Gently pat your beef medallions dry with paper towels. Season both sides generously with salt and pepper. This is key for great flavor!

2. Sear the Medallions: Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Carefully place the beef medallions in the hot skillet, making sure not to overcrowd the pan. You might need to cook them in batches. Sear for about 3-4 minutes per side for medium-rare, or longer for your preferred doneness. Once cooked, remove the beef from the skillet and set aside on a plate, loosely tented with foil to keep them warm.

3. Sauté the Mushrooms: Add the butter to the same skillet (no need to wipe it clean – those browned bits are flavor!). Once the butter has melted, add the sliced mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally, until they're beautifully browned and softened, about 5-7 minutes.

4. Add the Aromatics: Toss in the minced garlic and cook for another minute until fragrant. Be careful not to burn the garlic!

5. Make the Gravy Base: In a small bowl, whisk together the flour (or cornstarch) with the milk until smooth. This will help thicken our gravy.

6. Simmer the Gravy: Pour the beef broth into the skillet with the mushrooms. Bring it to a gentle simmer, scraping up any delicious browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Gradually whisk in the flour and milk mixture. Continue to cook and stir until the gravy has thickened to your liking.

Season with salt and pepper to taste.

7. Bring it All Together: Return the beef medallions to the skillet with the gravy. Spoon some of the hot gravy over the beef and let them warm through for a minute or two.





RECIPES



Leek Soup

Recipe by Julija Toth

A tasty soup with a refined flavor, ideal for any day—especially winter days.



Ingredients — for 6 persons

- * 6–7 leeks (white parts only)
- * 2 large potatoes
- * 2 celery stalks
- * 1 onion
- * 3–4 spring onions / scallions
- * 1 clove garlic
- * Juice of 1 lemon
- * 1½ cups meat stock/broth (preferably homemade)
- * ½ cup cream
- * 100 g grated Gruyère cheese
- * 150 g butter or olive oil
- * A few croutons (optional)
- * Salt and pepper



Method

1. Wash and clean the vegetables, then cut them into pieces—not too small.
2. Heat the butter or olive oil in a saucepan. Sauté all the vegetables together, stirring with a wooden spoon, until softened.
3. Add the stock, lemon juice, and 3–3½ cups of lukewarm water. Season with salt and pepper, cover the pot, and simmer over medium heat for about 1 hour.
4. Remove the vegetables from the pot with a slotted spoon and pass them through a food mill / vegetable masher until puréed. Return them to the pot, heat over medium heat, and add the cream and grated cheese. Bring the soup to a boil, then serve hot in deep bowls. If desired, add a few croutons or some fried leeks to each bowl.

Preparation: 30 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour

15 minutes





STORY BEHIND



The most dangerous cheese? by Julija Toth

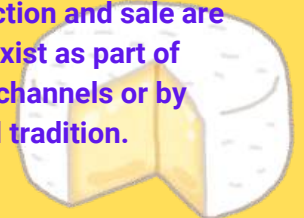


Casu marzu, which means "rotten cheese" in Sardinian, is one of the most infamous traditional foods of Sardinia, the Italian island known for its strong pastoral heritage. Made from sheep's milk, this unusual cheese is deliberately infested with the larvae of the cheese fly (*Piophilidae casei*), giving it a reputation for an exceptionally pungent flavor, a soft texture, and a controversial place in culinary history. The story of casu marzu begins centuries ago. The practice of allowing insects to break down and ferment cheese has ancient roots and is deeply connected to Sardinia's pastoral traditions and Roman history. In its earliest form, casu marzu was not created as a luxury or delicacy, but as a necessity. Sardinian shepherds lived in conditions where wasting food was not an option. When a wheel of pecorino became infested with flies or began to spoil, they ate it rather than throw it away. Over generations, what began as accidental spoilage gradually evolved into a prized local specialty.

As time passed, casu marzu became more than food. It grew into a symbol of Sardinian identity, resilience, and rural pride. Local traditions and mysticism became intertwined with the cheese, and it is often served during weddings, celebrations, and other important community gatherings, sometimes as a rite of passage. The making of casu marzu starts with an ordinary wheel of pecorino cheese. Cheesemakers remove part of the rind and leave the wheel outdoors. This attracts cheese flies, which lay their eggs inside the cheese. Once the eggs hatch, the larvae begin feeding on the fats and proteins. As they digest the cheese, they transform its texture, producing a creamy, soft paste through their activity. Eventually, a gooey liquid known as lagrimas, or "tears," seeps through the rind. At this point, the cheese is considered ready to eat.

Eating casu marzu is accompanied by its own customs and stories. The larvae inside the cheese are active jumpers and can leap several inches when disturbed. Because of this, diners often shield their eyes while eating. Traditionally, the wheel is sliced open and the oozing paste is spread onto Sardinian flatbread known as pane carasau. The cheese is commonly paired with a strong, full-bodied red wine called Cannonau. One of the most important local traditions surrounding casu marzu is known as the golden rule: the larvae must be alive when the cheese is eaten. According to local belief, dead maggots indicate that the cheese has spoiled beyond a safe point and should be discarded.

The cheese's notoriety eventually spread far beyond Sardinia. In 2009, Guinness World Records named casu marzu the world's "most dangerous cheese." Health officials have warned that if the larvae survive stomach acid, they may cause intestinal lesions, nausea, vomiting, and bloody diarrhea. Today, casu marzu occupies a unique position between tradition and regulation. Because it does not comply with modern European Union food hygiene standards, its commercial production and sale are illegal in Italy and many other countries. Nevertheless, the cheese continues to exist as part of Sardinian culture and can still be found on the island through local black-market channels or by purchasing it directly from trusted shepherds who continue the centuries-old tradition.





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