

Bernard Guillas | Healthy Eating Recipes Expert | Behind the Burner

http://www.behindtheburner.com/expert/bernard_guillas.html

November 1, 2010

What were your favorite foods growing up? The bounty of my grandmother's orchard and garden. She grew the beautiful root vegetables for her Friday pot au feu that would be simmering in the fireplace from 8am until 6pm.

When did you decide you wanted to be a chef?

When I grew up, in France, we had career day every Saturday for one hour. The boys would all assemble in the workshop. On the other hand, the girls would be baking. Hmmm...I love girls. I showed up at one of the classes and was the only boy in the classroom. I was told that I had the wrong class, but I stayed and made a beautiful chocolate soufflé. I became instantly the talk of the campus and decided to do more cooking.

Where and when did your career in food begin?

My career began in 1978 where I did an apprenticeship with Georges Paineau at the Restaurant le Bretagne- a 2 star Michelin. I was there for 2 years and had a lot of fun.

If you didn't become a chef, what would you be?

A photographer. I love to capture the essence of life, culture and the true essence of the planet.

Who/what has shaped your cooking the most over the years?

My travels and all of the people that I have met along the way. A true discovery of ancient spices and diverse cooking techniques from the Amazon basin to Hong Kong Island to Tbilisi.

How would you describe your cuisine?

Global, modern, sustainable, in season and enriched with a touch of love: the spice of life.

What influences your cooking style and particularly the menu at your restaurant?

The bounty of the sea, farm to table, artisanal ingredients and the collaboration with my culinary team.

What are your favorite culinary weapons in the kitchen?

My brain. Otherwise, my thermal whip for foams, microplane for the perfect shave, cast iron skillet for a good sear, my spice grinder to blend and create and an assortment of different shaped plates with the purest white that I use as a canvas to make my dishes sing.

What is your favorite secret ingredient

Fennel and dill pollen, Himalayan sea salt slab to cure my Kona Kampachi, plum powder for the perfect marinade and lemon myrtle oil.

What is the one rule or value you try to instill in all of your staff?

The integrity of ingredients and the consistency of your cooking techniques and presentation.

What qualities do you look for when hiring cooks for your restaurant?

Passion, savvy, willingness to learn, flexibility and a good set of knives. The tools of the trade.

If I'm trying to watch my weight and I'm eating at your restaurant, what am I ordering to eat? Olive Oil Poached Washington Steelhead, Red Quinoa, Crows Pass Farm Root Vegetables, Heirloom Tomato Confit, Minus 8 Dressing.

What was the most challenging meal you had to make?

A Champagne DeVaux 7 course dinner in Taipei at Danny's Kitchen. Why? I left San Diego on Thanksgiving night after serving 2,200 covers and arrived on Saturday at 5:30 am. Dinner was at 7pm. Ooooolala-it went fantastic, but it was an Iron Chef journey.

What was your worst restaurant disaster?

Actually, it was not in the restaurant! This happened at my Grandmother's home when I was five years old. I was told to take a nap while my she went to town to pick up bread. I took it upon myself to try to help her make her soup and gathered a couple of pairs of shoes and put them in the pot. Ooops. I got in big trouble! Shoe soup!

What is your least favorite food?

Fast food. I just can't take it. Give me a baguette, butter, lettuce, tomato, ham and brie. I can survive for years on this.

What is your beverage of choice?

I love to discover all different types of tea. But at home with friends, give me some big reds. I love to go global.

What are some recent dining and culinary trends you have been observing?

Small plates, flavor intensity, in season, simple. Tasting flights brings excitement to your tastebuds and gives you the true identity of the chef and his restaurant.

When you are not eating at your own restaurant, where are you eating?

I love ethnic food. Middle Eastern, Thai, Cuban, Indian and so much more. Anywhere I travel.

Which foreign country inspires your style most? Southeast Asia. So many ingredients, techniques and interpretation.

What was the most spectacular meal you have ever had?

Le Grand Vefour in Paris, Tetsuya in Sydney and at my friend Daniel Boulud's in New York City.

What is your best cooking tip for a home enthusiast?

Keep it simple. Do not over crowd your pan when you are searing so you can get the best caramelization on your proteins.

What do you eat when you are home?

First I go to the Farmer's Market. Then I call my friends, fire up the grill and chill a nice bottle of bubbly. Let the good times roll.