



**A CAREER
AS A
CHEF**

Miss Page

A CAREER AS A

CHEF

THE CREATIVE COOK IS THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL RESTAURANT

YOU CAN BE A RESTAURATEUR – OWN YOUR OWN BUSINESS

RUNNING A RESTAURANT IS A PRECARIOUS BUSINESS. IT'S COSTLY TO START UP because of the necessary investment in equipment and furnishings. And you're dealing in a perishable product (food), so there's the potential for a lot of waste, which translates into wasted money. Finding the perfect location is critical. The ideal area has a lot of foot traffic, but rent in such a desirable location can be astronomical. If you somehow find a great space for reasonable rent in an undiscovered but up-and-coming area, you can be sure you won't be the only restaurant there for long.

Competition for so-called "share of stomach" is cutthroat. You're competing with other restaurants that are like yours, restaurants that are more casual or swankier than yours, restaurants offering a different style of cuisine. You're constantly under pressure to market your restaurant as a desirable destination.

A restaurateur wants both to attract a loyal following and to draw new, first-time patrons, so you must offer a core menu of favorite dishes while regularly revising and updating the daily, weekly, or seasonal specials. Because after all is said and done, it's really about the food.

That's what makes a good chef so valuable. The chef is the one key element that can make or break a restaurant.

You may already know what restaurant chefs do, or think you know. Restaurant chefs cook. In restaurants. That's all there is to it – right?

Perhaps you even harbor a fantasy of a professional chef at work: Dressed in an immaculate white uniform and hat, he/she holds court in a gleaming, stainless-steel kitchen, presiding over a busy team of diligent and accomplished sous-chefs. Every so often, a cry of “My compliments to the chef!” is heard from the dining room and the chef is summoned to the table of a rich and powerful person to be praised.




Such a fantasy is loosely based in reality. But a chef may also serve as an accountant, inventory maintenance clerk, personal coach, and chief bottle-washer. A chef wears many hats besides just a toque.

This guide will introduce you to a career as a restaurant chef. You’ll learn what chefs do when they’re not cooking, supervising their assistants, or being treated like royalty. We’ll tell you what kind of training and education you’ll need, what’s appealing about this career and what are the necessary evils, and the personal qualifications you should possess. You’ll also find out what chefs earn and what the outlook is for this career. And we’ll tell you how to get started right away.

Like most artists, those who practice the culinary arts say they can’t imagine making their living any other way. Cooking is simply something they have to do. Whatever difficulties chefs encounter and sacrifices they must make along the way are far outweighed by the joy and satisfaction they derive from just doing their jobs.

PREPARING FOR THIS CAREER

THE ROAD TO BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL CHEF CAN BE A LONG, ARDUOUS, AND expensive one, so it’s important to make sure you’ll find this kind of work rewarding before you make a commitment. And if you do decide to embark upon this journey, preparation will put you ahead of the game. Therefore, the most important things you can do right now are:

-  **Practice cooking**
-  **Investigate the culinary world**
-  **Take your classroom studies seriously – not just cooking classes, academics as well.**

There are opportunities every single day to practice cooking. Learning to cook requires more than just being able to follow a recipe. There are skills and techniques that must be honed: folding an omelet in half without the filling sliding out; knowing when to remove pasta from boiling water at the precise moment before it becomes soggy; trimming a

birthday cake with decorative icing; cutting a watermelon into a basket to hold fruit salad; filleting a fish; setting cherries jubilee aflame without causing personal injury or property damage.

The more you cook, the more you'll learn about the chemistry of cooking. Especially if you mess up. Accidentally leaving the baking powder out of pancakes, for instance, will renew your respect for this ingredient.

With practice, too, you'll discover which flavors complement each other. Using a combination of confidence, knowledge, and trial-and-error (What if I used peanut butter in this lamb curry? How would my risotto taste with a dash of nutmeg?), you'll be able to invent your own dishes. Most professional chefs develop a unique, signature style and become known for a particular type of cuisine. Write down your recipes so you can recreate the dishes.

If yours is a busy household where food often comes in takeout containers, your family will certainly welcome the occasional home-cooked meal. Offer to provide refreshments for parties or school events. Organize a fundraising bake sale. Experiment with all types of dishes – hot and cold foods, soups, sauces, open-faced sandwiches, hors d'oeuvres, breads, fish, poultry, meat, casseroles, desserts.

Explore various regional, national, ethnic, and other cuisines:

- Sub-Saharan (peanut soup, chutneys)
- Middle Eastern (tabouli, hummus, pita bread)
- Spanish (tapas, tortillas)
- Indian (curry, pilaf)
- Southern US (jambalaya, gumbo, Cajun catfish)
- Jewish (potato pancakes, blintzes)
- Vegetarian (vegetables, beans, soy products, meat substitutes – try to make something with tofu that tastes good!)

Lots of young people work in restaurants to earn extra money. You can earn money and learn about this career at the same time. Don't expect to be permitted to cook, but do look for a job that allows you to spend a lot of time in the kitchen so you can get a feel for the environment, see how food is prepared, and develop relationships with the people who work in the "back of the house."

Apprenticeship is a long-standing tradition in this career. It's not unlikely the chef where you work learned at the side of a mentor. So don't be afraid to consider your chef a mentor. Ask him/her for answers to your questions, advice, and guidance. Set aside some quiet time for this. The

dinner rush is not a good time to ask, “Do you prefer the thumping or the sniffing method for selecting a ripe cantaloupe?”

Visit your local housewares store and ask the salesperson to describe the different items to you. Or, read product literature or cookbooks, or poke around on the Internet, to find out more about the implements and equipment used by chefs. A good knife is a chef’s most important tool. Find out how to select one. What’s the difference between a forged blade and a stamped blade, and which makes for a higher quality knife? Why is high carbon stainless steel the most desirable material for a blade? Should you choose knives with wooden or plastic handles? When do you use a serrated knife?

Conduct the same research for cookware. Find out the difference between copper, cast iron, aluminum, and stainless steel. Pretend you’re furnishing a new kitchen, and comparison shop. Handle pots and pans made of different materials. Feel the weight of the cast iron. Is that appealing to you, or less appealing than lighter cookware? Shiny copper cookware is so very attractive. Would you be willing to scrub it after every use to keep it that way?

Finally, pay attention to your coursework in high school. What you will study in culinary school is not so different from what you’re probably studying now:

Math Chefs need to calculate recipe conversions, prepare cost analyses, stick to a budget, and perform accounting tasks.

Social studies, History These courses teach you about the countries and the cultures that produced the myriad cuisines.

Science Gastronomy is a science!

Languages You’ll probably be interacting with people whose first language is not English; French, Spanish, German, and Italian will help you communicate with them. Languages will also help you understand the language of the culinary arts, including such terms as *al dente*, *hors d’oeuvres*, and *pièce de résistance*.

English, Composition, Speech These will help you express your thoughts and ideas, which you’ll need to do whenever you develop recipes or simply interact with other members of the kitchen staff.

Computers Computers are used extensively in the hospitality industry, with systems covering everything from foodservice management to cost controls to recipe writing.

Art Any class that teaches you to appreciate the visual arts will be helpful. Chefs don't just make great food, they make great-looking food. Components are arranged artfully on a plate, adorned with appropriate garnishes, with color and texture taken into consideration.

Physical Education Kitchen work is chaotic and strenuous and – even though some of the most famous chefs are strikingly overweight – it's desirable to be in good physical shape. Most culinary schools require students to take some form of not-for-credit physical education and/or stress-relief classes.

As for cooking classes in particular, see what your local community college or youth center has to offer for people your age.

HISTORY OF THIS CAREER

LOTS OF US ASSOCIATE THE CULINARY ARTS WITH EUROPE – FRANCE IN PARTICULAR, AS well as Italy. However, as is true of many things that have contributed to making life easier and more pleasant in Western cultures, this idea probably originated in the East. For example, pasta was introduced in Italy after Marco Polo visited the Orient. The Chinese essentially invented the concepts of fine restaurant dining, catering – and even takeout food.

The Tang dynasty, whose reign began in 618, saw a period of affluence and artistic and cultural achievement in China. The nation's rapidly growing urban centers drew prominent and influential people from Asia and the Mediterranean: ambassadors, merchants, philosophers, scribes, intellectuals. Construction and expansion of the Grand Canal enabled extensive trade between the rice-growing southern Yangtze Valley with the more commercialized north, and agricultural advances during the Song dynasty (960-1279) increased food production.

In this environment of prosperity, creativity, a plentiful food supply, and exposure to new ideas and influences, the culinary arts developed and restaurants began to flourish, particularly in the great Chinese cities of Kaifeng and Hangchow. The opulent restaurants featured bills of fare that changed on a regular basis (much as menus do today, to reflect daily specials or the day's seafood catch or whatever produce is in season). They also went in and out of style among the fashionable set – much as restaurants do today. Fine restaurants started to offer catering services, preparing and serving meals at the homes of wealthy patrons.

Casual tea houses and noodle shops also sprouted up to feed the cities' day laborers, and can be compared with modern-day coffee shops

and diners. Eventually, Chinese restaurants began to prepare take-out food that customers could buy on-site and eat in the comfort of their own homes.

During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Europeans began visiting China in greater numbers and a broad exchange of cultures and influences ensued. China's culinary tradition spread to Italy, Sicily, and beyond.

In parts of Medieval Europe, most notably Italy, it became customary for the wealthy and the noble classes to employ the best chefs and entertain lavishly. In their courts and their castles, the upper classes hosted extravagant banquets that lasted for hours and included multiple courses, with entertainment provided by poets, magicians, and musicians. Some dishes were so elaborate they were meant to be admired more than to be consumed.

The finest chefs were treated like celebrities and showered with gifts and praise – as long as they pleased their employers. If they displeased their employers in any way, however, they were publicly humiliated, even punished. And chefs were customarily ordered to taste any dish at the table before the master took his first bite, in case the food was poisoned!

Arguably the First Family of Florence, the Medicis were among the aristocrats noted for the high quality of their chefs. When Catherine de Medici moved to France in 1533 to marry Henry V, she brought her chef with her. At that time, French cooking was crude and basic. But the French cooks were a quick study, and France soon made *haute cuisine* (gourmet cooking) its own.

Public restaurants and thereby access to the food of great chefs became available to ordinary French citizens in the late 18th century. The French Revolution, which began in 1789 and lasted a decade, eliminated the power of the aristocracy while empowering a new middle class. Chefs who had been employed by the titled and wealthy found themselves without jobs, so they began to open restaurants of their own. Dining out became a popular pastime for people who could afford it.

Two of the most famous European chefs of the 19th century were the Frenchmen Antonin Carême and Georges-Auguste Escoffier. Born in Paris and apprenticed to a pastry chef while still in his teens, Antonin Carême became known as “cook of the kings and king of the cooks.” He served in the most aristocratic kitchens in Europe and Russia, cooking in Austria for the Hapsburgs, in England for the Prince of Wales (later King George IV), in France for Talleyrand, Napoleon, and the royal family, as well as for the Baron de Rothschild and Czar Alexander I of Russia.

Carême was renowned for his uncompromising standards as much as for his spectacular gastronomic set pieces inspired by great sculptures and architectural masterpieces. He made statues out of lard, intricate “carvings” from spun sugar, and reproduced Greek ruins with marzipan. Carême believed in providing food for mind and heart. Dishes were presented on ornamental pedestals.

Carême also wrote extensively on gastronomy. He is considered the inventor of *La Grande Cuisine Française*, the classic French way of cooking.

Unlike Carême, Georges-Auguste Escoffier was not the private chef to the rich and famous. Rather, his illustrious career took place in restaurants. And while the former was known for opulence, the latter was known for simplicity. Escoffier revolutionized and modernized the menu by reducing the number of courses served, identifying dishes in the order in which they would be served, and making items available *à la carte* (literally, “from the menu,” selected individual items rather than set complete meals). He shunned showy culinary displays and rich, heavy sauces, and emphasized lighter fare and the use of seasonal ingredients. And he reorganized the commercial kitchen, integrating autonomous departments into a more efficient single unit. Later in his career, Escoffier wrote several books, started his own cooking school, and sponsored charitable efforts to feed the hungry and provide financial assistance to retired chefs.

America’s culinary tradition owes much to the influences of European and other immigrants. For instance, New Orleans is one of the great restaurant capitals of the United States, if not the world, and Creole cooking is its leading contribution to the culinary arts. The Creole people are descendants of French and Spanish settlers of the Gulf States and their food is a spicy blend of dishes from these two countries. In New Orleans of the 17th century, a prominent citizen’s status was determined by how lavishly he entertained and how good his chef was. But hard times befell the city and families had to dismiss their domestic staffs, and entrepreneurial chefs opened their own restaurants.

The taverns in the US Colonies were fashioned after the popular public houses in England. At first they sold mostly beer, with meals as an afterthought. But when late 19th-century advances in transportation and refrigeration made beef a staple in the American diet, steakhouses began to crop up.

Meanwhile, massive numbers of people were immigrating to the States – European chefs among them. The chefs soon realized they needed to exchange information and ideas with one another and provide mutual support in an organized fashion; and in 1929, the American Culinary

Federation (AFC) was founded. In 1936, the AFC formed a society to honor and preserve the memory and traditions of Georges-Auguste Escoffier. It was called Les Amis d'Escoffier and the first meeting was held in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. This hotel also employed one of the most famous American chefs of this period, Oscar Tschirky (known as Oscar of the Waldorf). In addition to his cooking, he was famous for pampering his glamorous and illustrious patrons while treating the less-prominent clientele with cool disdain.

The New York World's Fair in 1939 and 1940 boasted exhibits from dozens of countries, many of which served local dishes. At the French pavilion, Americans enjoyed haute cuisine for the first time. The popularity of this exhibit would encourage numerous French chefs to move to the U.S.

During the 1950s and 1960s, fast food and other casual chain restaurants began to appear. The proliferation of such eating establishments meant that entire families could go out to dinner without spending a fortune, there was always something that kids would like, and the menu never changed so customers knew what they would be offered. What was lost in quality of food or originality of presentation was made up for in reliability, convenience, and affordability. Family restaurants are still a booming business.

In the past 40 years, American cuisine has continued to undergo transformations and different styles have come in and out of fashion. During the 1960s, immigrants from the Caribbean brought island flavors to the US; in the 1970s, hot, spicy Szechwan cuisine was introduced and forever changed the way we think of Chinese food; the 1980s was dominated by *nouvelle cuisine*, which was characterized by comically small portions and artistic presentation. Currently popular are *cuisine du marché*, which means "according to market supply" and uses only fresh, seasonal ingredients; and fusion cooking, which originally referred to "East meets West" cuisine, but now incorporates just about all ethnic cuisines. For a creative chef, the possible combinations are virtually unlimited!



WHERE CHEFS WORK

THERE ARE MORE THAN 300,000 FULL-SERVICE RESTAURANTS IN THE UNITED STATES. (Full-service restaurants offer table service by waitstaff and emphasize ambiance and quality of food. Fast-food eateries are not considered full-service restaurants.) Lots of full-service restaurants are part of a chain – that is, a group of restaurants with the same name, appearance, and menu. In these ways, they are like a fast-food franchise, but chain restaurants are more upscale and usually provide much broader menus.

Despite the proliferation of chains, the majority of full-service restaurants are individually owned and locally operated. Virtually all authentic ethnic restaurants and gourmet dining establishments are independently owned.

Restaurants are found all over the United States, but most fine dining takes place where connoisseurs and tourists live or visit, and this means vacation destinations, resorts, and major metropolitan areas. One of the chief drawbacks of vacation and resort areas is that work may be seasonal. One of the chief draws of urban centers is that that's where the very best restaurants are and therefore the very best opportunity to find someone to serve as a mentor. There are also more restaurants in highly populated areas, along with a community of chefs available for learning and support.

THE WORK CHEFS DO

THE FIRST FIVE OR SIX YEARS AFTER COOKING SCHOOL ARE GENERALLY SPENT working under chefs at different restaurants in their respective specialties.

Chef de Garde At first, you probably won't be doing any cooking. Rather, you will assist at one of the stations, such as meat, fish, or vegetables. The *chef de garde* plates the cold dishes such as appetizers, terrines, mousses, hors d'oeuvres, salads, paté, and their accompanying sauces and garnishes.

Prep Chef The prep chef prepares foods for cooking, weighing and measuring ingredients; cleaning, peeling, and chopping vegetables; cleaning fish and grinding meat; stirring sauces and straining soups; plucking pheasants, perhaps, or selecting four perfect portabello mushrooms for stuffing. At all times, you will be expected to keep an orderly kitchen. There's even a French culinary term for this that's used in

professional kitchens, *mise en place*, which means “everything in its place.”

Line Cook Your first cooking position will probably be as a line cook. Line cooks may cook only one type of food (vegetables, fish, sauces), they may cook only one way (sautéing, broiling, frying), or they may cook whatever is the next thing in line to be cooked to ensure that all parts of the meal are finished at the same time.



Sous Chef Line cooks fill orders from the dining room received from the sous-chef. You'll probably be expected to learn every position in the line before becoming a sous-chef.

In addition to cooking, the sous-chef takes inventory and orders supplies, supervises the staff, and serves as liaison between diners and line cooks by expediting orders, making sure orders are filled in a timely fashion, and ensuring that all customers in a single party are served at the same time.

The pastry chef is a sous-chef whose domain is baked goods and desserts.

Head Chef Depending on the size of the establishment, the person at the top of the hierarchy may bear the title of chef, *chef de cuisine*, head chef, or executive chef. In smaller, more modest restaurants, the *chef de cuisine* is generally the top-ranked person in the kitchen, and to call that person an “executive chef” would be pretentious. In fact, there may be just one chef in a small restaurant, assisted by a short-order cook.

Larger, more elaborate restaurants employ several chefs, and have both a *chef de cuisine* and an executive chef, who may actually be a general manager of the dining establishment or even an owner. It generally takes at least 10 years to get to that level.

Responsibilities at this level include managing, overseeing, and coordinating the work of the kitchen staff, interacting with the managers of the dining room, handling administrative responsibilities such as budget preparation, and generally running the kitchen and maintaining the well-being of the dining establishment.

Chefs also develop menus and select dishes to include based on seasonal availability, popular demand in the past, number of customers expected, what prepared dishes or ingredients are currently left over from recent meals, what food is sitting in the refrigerator or pantry that shouldn’t be wasted. They also price each menu item based on the cost of the ingredients, labor, and overhead. They may continue to cook their signature dishes; and they create new dishes, although lower-ranked chefs are likely to be the ones who execute these dishes on a daily basis.

Very distinguished chefs often make appearances in the dining room to greet important guests, make recommendations, and take their orders.

Chef-Owner For many chefs, the ultimate dream is to open their own restaurant. This usually happens after 10 to 15 years in the restaurant business. An aspiring restaurateur should have a signature style and a clear vision of what the restaurant should be – not just the menu, but size, desired clientele, atmosphere, decor, location, image, and the role the chef is to play in the entire operation. The chef-owner will almost always need to obtain adequate financing, as a new restaurant is a very expensive and very risky undertaking.

Many chefs who own restaurants spend little time in the kitchen and a lot of time associating with patrons, networking with other chefs, wooing the media so that food critics and reporters will visit the restaurant, and dining out at competing restaurants to evaluate their offerings, prices, and service. Chef-restaurateurs remain in the culinary world they love, but must also develop business-savvy.

A SLIGHT DIVERSION

IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY, WHICH INCORPORATES THE RESTAURANT AND LODGING businesses, staff are often divided into two categories: those who work front of the house and those who work back of the house.

Front-of-the-house employees are those who have direct contact with customers, while back-of-house workers perform their tasks behind the scenes. With the exception of the celebrity chef who makes the rounds of the dining room greeting special guests, kitchen staff, including the chef, are considered back-of-the-house.

Because seamless service is the goal of every fine restaurant, it's useful to know what the front-of-house restaurant staff is doing to maximize every patron's dining experience. Here's what the staff of a top-notch restaurant does.

Maître d'Hôtel, better known as the abbreviated *maître d'* (usually pronounced "mayter dee"): Responsible for overall management of service at the restaurant. Usually greets patrons at the door. May also be referred to as headwaiter, or there may be a headwaiter who serves under the maître d'.

Coat checker A person who is installed in a small booth located near the restaurant's entrance and receives guests' coats, scarves, briefcases, laptops, etc.

Host or hostess Greets guests, shows them to their tables, hands out menus.

Service waiter Takes the first drink order immediately.

Sommelier or wine steward May be summoned for recommendations. ("Is it okay to have red wine with fish?")

Captain The main waiter. Responsible for a specific section of the restaurant. Watches his or her tables to ascertain when guests appear to be ready to order. Tells diners about the daily specials and answers questions. Takes the order. Service waiter reads order, brings appropriate plates, glassware, and silverware to the table, based on guests' requests.

Second waiter Delivers orders to the kitchen, brings food and drinks to patrons.

Bussers Fill water glasses, deliver bread and butter, clear dishes and take them to the kitchen.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

DESPITE THE EXTREME COMPETITIVENESS OF THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY, CHEFS SHARE their knowledge generously. After all, many people who became great chefs learned this craft by working at the side of someone who was already a great chef. Some of these efforts are undertaken to gain a profit; others, mainly to gain publicity for a particular chef or restaurant.

Chefs often do cooking demonstrations, give lectures and seminars, and teach in venues ranging from cooking academies to professional-chef events to food trade shows to housewares departments in department stores.

Some chefs share what they know with the general public by writing cookbooks, producing cooking videos, writing articles for magazines, or publishing newsletters.

Are you a natural-born performer? Julia Child, Emeril Lagasse ("Emeril Live"), Martin Yan ("Yan Can Cook"), Ainsley Harriott, and Susan Feniger and Mary Sue Milliken ("Too Hot Tamales," "Tamales' World Tour") are among the chefs who have had their own television series. Scores of others have been featured on morning programs on network television and food channels on cable television.

Numerous well-known chefs have parlayed their fame into products that are sold in supermarkets, through catalogues, and over the Internet. For instance, Paul Prudhomme – chef, restaurateur (opened K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen in New Orleans), and entrepreneur – created his own line of all-natural "Magic Seasoning Blends," which are distributed internationally; and also produces his own seasoned and smoked meats, available through his own mail-order catalogue. Jean-Georges Vongerichten, another leading chef and restaurateur, sells his line of sauces via a well-known catalogue for cooks. Daniel Boulud, honored as Best Chef of the Year by the Chef in America Association, offers a "Private Stock" line of Caspian caviar and Scottish smoked salmon offered via direct mail.

Other chefs with restaurant experience may become personal chefs to people with more money than time; some open catering businesses.

Finally, although it's not technically an official duty, it's notable that many chefs report being actively involved in charities, particularly those that feed the hungry, such as Meals on Wheels. The acclaimed San Francisco-area chef and restaurant-owner Alice Waters is among the most devoted and innovative.

RESTAURANT CHEFS TELL YOU ABOUT THEIR CAREERS

I'm a Professional Chef who Almost Became an Engineer

"I came to this field quite by accident. I was working at a restaurant in high school in order to earn money so I could buy a car. I was fascinated and wound up learning all about every position in the kitchen. When my manager asked what I was going to do when I graduated from high school, I told him I intended to study electrical engineering. He thought otherwise and directed me into the world of culinary arts.

I considered his advice, and ultimately graduated from The National Centre for Culinary Arts at Sullivan College in Louisville, Kentucky. For students who are interested in this career, I would advise them to make sure that you want to do this for the rest of your life, since schooling can be expensive and difficult.

Being a chef means being engaged in every aspect of the kitchen, and then some. My work day involves checking reservations, preparing special party menus, creating daily specials, making inventory checks and balances, supervising food preparation and food production, maintaining employee schedules, and many other tasks. A chef must be a businessperson, problem solver, innovator, maintenance person, cook, dishwasher, and even a baby-sitter.

I enjoy working with the multitude of diverse people who work in, and patronize, restaurants. Providing each guest a memorable dining experience by knowing that my team of cooks and I made that happen, is extremely rewarding.

Long hours are the main downside, as well as low pay as you work your way up to the level of chef. A cook can expect to work from 30 to 50 hours a week and make \$8 to \$12 per hour. In comparison, chefs work from 50 to 90 hours a week and make \$25,000 to \$80,000 or more per year.

I also dislike the perception that some people have of the restaurant industry. If you work for a chain restaurant, you will be

perceived as something of a “lesser” chef. And even if you work for a fine establishment, you may not enjoy the respect and consideration you have worked for and deserve.

This field requires long hours, hard work, dedication, guts, and inflicts many mental and physical pressures. But I could not imagine a more enjoyable and rewarding career!”

I Run a Catering Business and Own a Company that Sells a Line of Gourmet Spice Blends

“I’ve been cooking since I was six years old. I love to cook. When my family discovered this fact, they taught me everything they knew, and by the age of 12, I was pretty much a virtuoso.

After two years of college, studying math and science, I moved to San Francisco. The first thing I did was try to get a job cooking. During my first year in culinary school, I decided I wanted to be the best chef in the world and run a giant, first-class hotel. I’ve worked in numerous restaurants as head chef and executive chef, all of the top-notch. One of the restaurants received a four-star rating for its cuisine shortly after I began working there.

It was at this restaurant where I began to develop my own flavorings and spice blends. Diners started asking me what was in a certain dish, and eventually I started making up batches of spice blends. Now I sell them commercially and over the Internet. They’re distributed mainly in the Midwest, although they’re also available at specialty stores nationwide. I have six spice blends in the line, ranging from a hot pepper blend to an all-purpose seasoning to a mixture of sweet spices that’s perfect for desserts and chutneys.

I recently resigned as a restaurant chef and started a gourmet, special-event catering business. I also consult and provide classroom instruction in cooking.

There are many facets of food, from fast food, mass production, gourmet and specialty foods. There are also many different types of chefs. Find where you want to be and do it. Try to understand fully the nature of the business. Chefs make less

money than professionals in a lot of other fields, but if you love it, you will be successful. There is no greater feeling than a great compliment from a satisfied diner.”

I’m Executive Sous-Chef at a Resort

Hotel Near Tampa, Florida

“I got into the business as a line cook, which I did for three years. I found I had a flair for cooking and I enjoyed the work. I decided to make a career of it and went to culinary school. I graduated from a two-year Culinary Arts program, with an Associate Degree. Now I am a Certified Chef and I also belong to the American Culinary Federation.

In my current position, I spend most of my time ordering, scheduling, cooking, cleaning up, talking to guests, working on menu and plate development, office and administrative work such as meetings, taking inventory, receiving and storing items like supplies and fresh produce, and training and coaching my staff. Most of the satisfaction in this work comes from a job well done, happy customers, and their positive comments. But the hours are long and I don’t get to spend as much time with my family as I’d like.

If you think you want to become a Chef, get into the business for at least a year before pursuing culinary school. Many schools require this anyway. In any case, it will provide valuable real-world experience and give you a chance to see how you like the business.”

I’ve Worked for Fine Dining

Establishments in Exclusive Clubs

and Top-Notch Restaurants for 10

Years

“I became a chef after many years of front-of-the-house experience in the bar and bar/restaurant business. I worked as a doorman, a bartender, and a manager during my early twenties. I left the business only to return for good when I went to chef school in Baltimore at the ripe old age of 30. That was 12 years ago and I have come a long way and for the most part enjoyed my journey.

After chef school, I gave myself a self-imposed few years of apprenticeship. I left Baltimore and went to work for a season in Palm Springs at the Hyatt Grand Champion in Indian Wells. Next I worked nearly a year in Long Beach at a huge seafood and steak restaurant known as The Reef. These were all line positions. Learning the basics in school combined with years of line training are essential, in my opinion, to becoming a great cook. I, for one, believe that cooking is what it is all about. I love to cook! That is why I am a chef."

I Am a Chef for a Catering Company "I moved up through the ranks to restaurant sous chef, hotel sous chef, restaurant executive chef, and even hotel executive chef. Presently I am the chef for a small but high volume catering company in the suburbs of the Kansas City area.

I found this position to be perfect for my needs. I worked many years at night when I was learning my craft. I now work mainly morning shifts with some weekend night work during peak periods. I work in a small kitchen with only a few staff members. The up side to this is that staffing concerns were always my biggest challenge as a hotel chef. I now have two very reliable people who are eager to crank out high-quality product.

I have quality of life today, which is crucial in the long run. I advise anyone who loves the business to pursue their dreams. I can find a job anywhere on this planet and live anywhere I wish because 'everybody eats.'

However, the drawbacks are many, especially at first. The hours are long, and oftentimes restaurants are high-stress environments. The pay has come a long way in my day but is still not an avenue to wealth. Holiday working is a must unless you find the right position. My company stresses quality of life because we are a small company with the owners and myself doing the majority of the work. Our staff is small and fluctuates with part-time servers during seasonal periods. I am a single parent and have the ability to take excellent care of my son and pursue a very satisfying career. I am moving into the wedding season and must say it is very enjoyable to see a bride and groom smile as they take

their first walk together along a buffet line I created especially for them and their guests.

A typical day for me begins about 8:30 am. I arrive at work and begin my lunch orders. I have many corporate accounts and have usually 120 to 300 lunches to prepare every weekday. I execute lunch and move on to prep. If there are evening events, I prepare for them. Prep is what it is all about. I write a prep sheet for the next day and look ahead to the rest of the week for any early prep, which can be done.

Organization and time efficiency are the two most important keys to success. You must have your kitchen organized, your staff organized, your self super-organized, and you must use time as efficiently as possible. This is crucial to success. A successful chef must be able to maximize his or her time to the utmost. Doing many things at once is vital.

The day progresses and I leave about 5:00 pm. This fluctuates. Sometimes I have to work the breakfast shift. Sometimes I have five weddings on a Saturday night I have to cook for all day. But, normally I can be home to take my son to soccer practice.

I love being a chef. Cooking is my life in many ways. I advise young adults to find a good school, apprentice in a multitude of places, work at the best places you can find – and grow. Then let your gifts take you to your limits.”

PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS YOU WILL NEED

JUST LIKE ALL ARTISTS, PRACTITIONERS OF THE CULINARY ARTS HAVE CREATIVITY AND imagination in abundance. They are aesthetically adventurous with a fine sense of balance. All of these traits are necessary for developing tasty and surprising new dishes that are arranged most attractively.

And like all craftspeople, chefs need technical skills. Chefs must be good with their hands for such tasks as slicing, dicing, kneading, and chopping, as well as applying garnishes and ornamentation, carving fowl, making rosebuds out of radishes and scrolls out of carrots, stuffing and rolling cabbage leaves, and folding flounder into a parchment pouch.

Chefs also have to be able to take a methodical, step-by-step approach to getting things done. All cooking requires a precise sense of timing. If you're stir-frying, for instance, you need to know when to add the soft ingredients such as tofu and bok choy to the longer-cooking ingredients (broccoli, carrots) so that everything ends up tender-crispy and nothing remains undercooked or becomes soggy. But cooking for restaurants also means coordinating the preparation of dishes so that everybody sitting at a particular table is served at the same time.

Temperamentally, chefs have to work efficiently under pressure and keep their composure at all times. You may have seen chefs portrayed on movies or TV as hot-headed prima donnas, throwing their toques to the ground in a paroxysm of pique when someone puts a sprig of parsley on the wrong side of the plate, or pitching a fit when someone speaks above a whisper in the kitchen and a delicate soufflé falls. But this won't work in a real kitchen. There's just no room for this type of behavior. Just as in the entertainment business, in restaurants, "the show must go on." And teamwork is a critical part of the show behind the scenes.

The more you advance in your career, the more you'll be supervising others and the more important managerial skills will be. This means the ability to motivate people, good judgment, and business sense.

Finally, you'll need a commitment to excellence, the desire and willingness to uphold the highest of standards, and painstaking attention to detail. Such traits come naturally to those who have this calling.

ATTRACTIVE FEATURES OF THIS CAREER

A CAREER AS A CHEF OFFERS MANY REWARDS, AND THOSE WHO BECOME INVOLVED in this work report numerous sources of satisfaction.

First, everybody eats, and nearly everybody loves food. Food is central to some of life's biggest celebrations. Chefs who work in stand-alone restaurants, and those in hotels and resorts, get to share in people's birthdays, marriage proposals, graduations, anniversaries, reunions with old friends, Bar Mitzvahs, and weddings. What could be more important or meaningful than feeding people? And what could be more fun and rewarding than helping them celebrate the momentous events in their lives?

This is creative work. The best chefs are artists whose creations happen to be edible. Just as a painter might revere the richness of oil paints or the translucent serenity of watercolors, or a sculptor might delight in the way clay or marble takes shape beneath his hands, chefs also work with a medium (food) they appreciate, enjoy, and respect. They experiment with different combinations of ingredients, different methods of cooking, different styles of presentation. As all creative people know, being encouraged to use one's imagination and to innovate is a pleasure that is its own reward. Although chefs, like most artists, do it for the love of the work, knowing that people are willing to pay for what you create, and receiving sincere and enthusiastic feedback, remains the ultimate thrill.

Cooking is a science, as well as an art. Developing a new dish that turns out exactly as one planned is every bit as fulfilling as conducting a successful experiment in a laboratory.

Some chefs don't feel they receive the proper respect from the public, possibly because they work behind the scenes. But more and more, noteworthy chefs are achieving celebrity status in our society, especially when they head up well-reviewed restaurants in large cities or tourist destinations. Becoming a chef requires too much time, commitment, and energy to do it just for the possibility of fame and fortune. But it certainly is a perk!

UNATTRACTIVE FEATURES OF THIS CAREER

KITCHENS CAN BE HOT AND NOISY, AND CHEFS HAVE TO SPEND HOURS STANDING, lifting, stirring, rolling, so the work can be physically demanding and somewhat uncomfortable. The hours are long, and you'll be expected to work nights, weekends, and holidays when you'd rather be relaxing like the rest of the world. It's difficult to have a normal social or family life as a result.

There is almost constant pressure to produce, and the atmosphere during the dinner rush and other peak dining times is frenzied and high-stress.

Finally, the pay, at least at first, is low, a fact that chefs almost invariably bring up when asked about the least attractive aspects of this career.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING YOU WILL NEED

THE NUMBER OF COOKING SCHOOLS ACCREDITED BY THE AMERICAN CULINARY Federation (ACF) is small but growing, which means that more aspiring chefs are enrolling in formal programs. This, in turn, means that competition for the most desirable jobs in this already-competitive field will become even more formidable. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that you acquire formal training, such as a two-year program at an accredited culinary academy or a three-year apprenticeship program working directly under a professional chef.

There are approximately 700 schools that offer culinary coursework in the United States; about 100 are accredited by the ACF. Eight-week cooking programs are also offered by the US Armed Forces.

Most cooking schools bestow the Associate of Occupational Studies (AOS) degree in the Culinary Arts and/or the AOS in Baking & Pastry Arts. This degree is earned through four semesters of study on campus and one semester spent in an externship.

Bachelor of Science (BS) degrees are also available in the disciplines of Culinary Arts, Baking and Pastry Arts, and Food Service Entrepreneurship; and a handful of schools offer the world-famous Le Cordon Bleu culinary program, which is based on classical French cooking techniques. This curriculum culminates in the Le Cordon Bleu diploma.

After further formal training and restaurant experience, professionals can be certified by the AFC at the levels of cook, working chef, executive chef, and master chef.

When you're investigating cooking schools, you should look for a curriculum with some combination of classroom instruction, hands-on practice, and actual work in a professional, commercial kitchen. A low student-to-chef instructor ratio (not more than eight to 13 students per instructor) means that you'll get more personal attention and guidance.

Curricula vary, but some of the types of courses you're likely to be required to take fall into the following general categories:

Basics (food identification; selection and storage of food; introduction to gastronomy)

Fundamental cooking techniques (both classical and modern)

Fundamental baking techniques

Equipment (using and caring for knives and other tools)

Standards (personal hygiene, public health rules, sanitation and safety procedures, restaurant law)

Business management (menu planning, accounting and budget management, cost control, human resource management, determination of portion size, purchasing food supplies in quantity, marketing techniques, supervisory development, use of leftover food to reduce waste)

You'll also take classes that you might more properly associate with a liberal-arts curriculum, such as math and languages, but they'll have a relevant culinary focus:

- Baking Math
- Ethics in Foodservice
- Computers in the Food Business
- Professional Food Writing
- Food and Culture
- Interpersonal Communication
- Culinary French, German, Italian, or Spanish
- Psychology of Human Behavior.

Much of your time will be spent learning and practicing the preparation of the dishes, and using and caring for the implements and equipment you have learned about in class. You'll learn to measure and mix the raw ingredients, bake, broil, boil, sauté, roast, or otherwise cook

the food; arrange it on a plate; and prepare and apply the finishing touches and complements, such as sauces, garnishes, and decorations. You'll hone your organizational skills and your sense of timing.

You'll also learn about the nutritional value of foods and how to prepare classic dishes for a more health-conscious public.

You'll work with eggs, smoked meats, grains, lamb, legumes, beef, pastas, pork, poultry, veal, and vegetables to create delicious appetizers, hors d'oeuvres, salads, breads, desserts, entrees, hot and cold sandwiches, breakfasts, sauces and dressings, savory stocks, and soups.

You'll also undertake classroom and lab work in your specialty, which may be a particular type of food (bread, shellfish, sauces), a particular course in the meal (appetizers, salads, desserts), or the cuisine of a particular geographical region or group of people (Southwestern, vegetarian).

The final phase of your study involves working in an actual restaurant under the tutelage of a professional chef. These positions may be paid or unpaid. You could work in a delicatessen, a pastry shop, a casual restaurant, or a gourmet restaurant.

Some cooking schools operate their own working restaurants and have their students rotate through all the kitchen stations. Others have arrangements with local restaurants. At other schools, students are responsible for arranging their own externships. In such cases, you may choose to relocate to a faraway, exotic locale for this semester.

An alternative to cooking school is a formal three-year apprenticeship program. The ACF accredits such programs. Apprenticeships are offered by culinary institutes, trade associations, labor unions, and some hotels and restaurants.

WHAT YOU WILL EARN

EARNINGS VARY, DEPENDING ON WHERE AND WHAT TYPE OF ESTABLISHMENT YOU are working for (pay is highest in cities and resort areas and four-star restaurants), how much experience you have (an executive chef makes more than a chef working mainly on prep), and your reputation (famous chefs make top dollar and may work in or operate restaurants that bear their names).

The bottom line is that chefs' salaries tend to be on the low side, given the amount of training, dedication, talent, and skill required.

Entry-level cooks and chefs, including pastry chefs, can expect annual earnings of around \$25,000. A small bistro in a seasonal tourist area might offer a full-time chef with two years' experience a salary of \$35,000; a sous chef in a top-notch restaurant in a major metropolitan area might make \$40,000-plus, and a working dinner chef at a fine restaurant in a year-round tourist destination earns approximately \$50,000.

After five years of experience, most chefs can command salaries of at least \$40,000; after 10 years, \$50,000; after 15 years, \$60,000 to \$75,000. If they reach the level of executive or head chef, they can expect to earn \$80,000 a year or more.

Most employers also offer their full-time workers such benefits as participation in a 401(k) or other retirement plan, paid vacations, and health and life insurance. Some restaurants that are part of a chain may offer stock options, and those that belong to a hotel chain may allow employees to use the facilities (such as swimming pools, health clubs, and spas). Chefs may also be offered bonuses based on the level of business the restaurant does during a certain period; seasonal establishments may offer free housing to employees; and some employers provide uniforms and free meals.

Enterprising chefs who leave the restaurant business or start their own companies can make considerably more money. These include private chefs who work for wealthy individuals and self-employed chefs who operate their own catering firms. Other chefs have written cookbooks, launched packaged food lines, produced and starred in their own cooking programs on television, and have become classroom instructors. All of this can add substantially to a chef's earnings.

But here's a caveat: The one thing many chefs want most to do is to open their own restaurants. This is a grand and courageous undertaking, but it is by no means a road to riches. In many areas, the failure rate of

new restaurants approaches 90%, and even the successful ones can take years to break even. Then, when the restaurant is successful, it may decline in popularity and eventually have to close.

OUTLOOK FOR THIS CAREER

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES WILL BE PLENTIFUL FOR PREP COOKS, LINE COOKS, AND sous-chefs in the foreseeable future, although the number of top jobs at fine dining establishments will remain limited, and competition for these positions will be fierce.

Thanks to the boom economy that began in the mid-1990s, Americans in general have more money to spend on leisure-time activities like dining out. It goes without saying that wealthier people with plenty of cash tend to go out to eat more than people who are on tight budgets. And the restaurant business does generally flourish and decline along with the overall economy. But even if the economy takes a nosedive, there are other factors that ensure a steady stream of customers.

Projected population growth alone guarantees that there will be more people living in the US; hence, more potential restaurant patrons.

The number of dual-income families in which both partners work outside the home means that more families opt for the convenience of having someone else prepare dinner every so often. (Not to mention doing the dishes!)

There is a growing number of affluent people aged 45 and up, and fine dining establishments that employ highly skilled chefs appeal to this group.

GET STARTED TODAY!

KEEP PRACTICING YOUR TECHNIQUES AND EXPLORING THE WORLD OF COOKING, AND find out what you can do to prepare for cooking school or an apprenticeship. Take cookbooks out of your library. The classic *The Joy of Cooking* is an excellent source for beginners who've never even boiled an egg, and also features comparatively intricate recipes for the more seasoned cook. Lots of cookbooks also show you how to select fresh produce and meat and demonstrate the basics of preparing foods and cooking techniques.

Check the food section of your newspaper for articles and recipes and restaurant reviews (in many newspapers, Wednesday is usually designated as "food day"), read magazines that cover the gastronomic arts for the gifted amateur (such as *Gourmet*), for the professional chef (*Culinary Review*), and for the restaurateur (*Restaurant Business*).

Get in touch with the National Restaurant Association for information about this career and a list of cooking academies and vocational schools and colleges that offer relevant classes or programs. You can also find out more about apprenticeship programs from the American Culinary Federation, and you'll find a list of the handful of schools in the United States that offer Le Cordon Bleu diploma on the Internet at www.lecordonbleuschoolsusa.com/html/location.html.

When you know which program or programs you'd like to pursue, you'll have a better idea of what you can do right now to prepare and maximize your chances of being admitted to the program of your choice.

Here's what Antonin Carême – "cook of the kings and king of the cooks" – had to say about the culinary arts:

"Dining has much in common with painting and music. The painter, by richness of colors produces works that seduce the eye and the imagination; the musician, by the combination of his notes, produces harmony, and the sense of hearing receives the sweetest sensations that melody can produce. Our culinary combinations are of the same nature. The gourmet's palate and sense of smell receive sensations similar to those of the connoisseurs of painting and music."

You're about to embark upon an arduous but supremely rewarding adventure. Good luck seducing the senses of the lucky recipients of your art, and happy harmonizing!

ASSOCIATIONS

To learn even more about this career, you may want to contact industry trade associations and organizations and ask them to send information about careers in this field. Below are the names of a few organizations. Consult a directory of associations in your library for their current addresses and telephone numbers.

■ **American Culinary Federation**

<http://www.acfchefs.org>

■ **American Institute of Wine & Food**

■ **Chefs de Cuisine Association of America**

■ **Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education**

■ **Culinary Institute of America**

<http://www.ciachef.edu>

■ **Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union**

<http://www.hereunion.org>

■ **International Association of Culinary Professionals**

<http://www.iacp.com>

■ **National Restaurant Association**

<http://www.restaurant.org>

■ **Professional Chefs Association**

www.professionalchef.com

■ **Roundtable For Women In Foodservice**

<http://www.rfw.org>

■ **Service Employees International Union**

■ **Women Chefs & Restaurateurs**

PERIODICALS

You can find the addresses of these professional journals and magazines in a directory of publications at the library. You may find recent issues of some of the more popular periodicals in a large public library or university library. You can also write to the publication directly and request a sample copy and information on obtaining a regular subscription. Reading current periodicals can be an excellent way of getting a feel for what is happening in this field.

- ***Art Culinaire***
- ***Bon Appetit***
- ***Catering Industry Employee***
- ***Employees International Union***
- ***Chef***
- ***Cooking Light***
- ***Culinary Review (magazine of the American Culinary Federation)***
- ***Food and Wine***
- ***Food Arts***
- ***Gourmet***
- ***Pastry Art and Design***
- ***Restaurant Business***
- ***Restaurant News***
- ***Restaurant Wire***
- ***Saveur***
- ***Vegetarian times***

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