

# CHEF'S CHOICE

## 22 Culinary Masters Tell How Japanese Food Culture Influenced Their Careers and Cuisine

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Preface by Saori Kawano

Introduction: The Japanese Chef's Way of Thinking by Toshio Suzuki



**1. Elizabeth Andoh** **2**

*"One concept that's not addressed in the three main groups is 'mouth feel' which is very important to the Japanese."*

Author, culinary educator, leading English-language expert on Japanese cuisine, and resident of Japan for more than four decades explains how she first learned about *washoku* cuisine from the woman who would become her mother-in-law.



**2. Michael Anthony** **16**

*"Every chef whether he or she says it out loud or not, is a show-off. 'Take a look at this. Taste what I made.'"*

Executive Chef at Gramercy Tavern, New York City, and winner of the James Beard Foundation's Best Chef in New York City, 2012, talks about his career path from a small Japanese restaurant in Tokyo to Paris and then to Gramercy Tavern.



**3. David Bouley** **32**

*"Japanese chefs expand and go vertically and deeply into ingredients, whereas in the Western world, we expand outward, horizontally."*

Executive Owner/Chef of Bouley and Brushstroke, New York City, shares how he and Japanese agricultural experts from Kyoto brought artisanal ingredients to his *kaiseki*-inspired New York City restaurants.



**4. Wylie Dufresne**

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*“I want cooks to come here and exercise their brain a little bit. I want them to think while they're here.”*

Founder of wd~50 and Owner/Chef of Alder in New York City, describes how he and his team use Japanese ingredients in non-traditional Japanese ways.



**5. Ben Flatt**

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*“It doesn't matter how much you try, you just can't properly cut fish without using a Japanese knife.”*

Owner/Chef of Flatt's, a Japanese guesthouse and restaurant on the Noto Peninsula, recalls his culinary journey from Sydney, Australia to Noto and reveals the secrets of traditional Noto cuisine he learned from his Japanese in-laws.



**6. Eddy Leroux**

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*“When I conceive of a dish, I first write down my ideas. Then I do very basic drawings of the plate. I set up where I want to put things.”*

Chef de Cuisine at Daniel, New York City, recounts his career path and how he uses Japanese ingredients in the French kitchen.



**7. Nobu Matsuhisa**

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*“I have given customers a sense of Japanese traditional aesthetics while broadening their idea of what constitutes Japanese cuisine.”*

Owner/Chef of Nobu, and other restaurants worldwide, shares his story of what inspired him to become a restaurateur.



**8. David Myers**

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*“Treat people as if they can operate on the highest level, and they'll then rise to your expectations.”*

Owner/Chef of restaurants in Southern California and Las Vegas recounts how his first interest in Japan came while working with a Japanese chef at Charlie Trotter's in Chicago and how this experience led to his minimalist approach to dish preparation and menu development.



**9. Nils Norén**

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*“You can make the best onion soup, but if your station is a mess, it doesn't really matter. You will not succeed.”*

VP of Restaurant Operations for the Samuelsson Group and past VP at The French Culinary Institute says that his early discovery of Japanese food introduced him to the mindset that continues to influence his cooking and restaurant operations.



**10. Ben Pollinger**

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*“One of the hallmarks of Japanese cuisine is its focus on the simplicity of the main ingredient—directing it, seasoning it, or garnishing it with one other element that has complexity.”*

Executive Chef at Oceana, New York City, describes the cooking experiences that took him through various restaurants—both good and bad—to a five-star New York City venue and the challenges he faced along the way.



**11. Eric Ripert**

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*“The biggest problem I see in restaurant kitchens I've visited around the world is that the cooks are too busy to taste the food.”*

Chef, Co-owner of Le Bernardin explains his career path and how Japanese ingredients and cooking inspire and influence his French cuisine.



**12. Toni Robertson**

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*“We like to think it's all about the chef, but it really is not. The chef may steer the ship, but the complete dining experience is always the product of teamwork.”*

Executive Chef, Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Singapore, explains how cooking potluck dinners while working in an Air Force emergency room led her to managing restaurant and food services at one of New York and Singapore's top hotels.



**13. Michael Romano**

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*“There's something beautiful about repeating the dish, even if you had nothing to do with the creation of it.”*

Chef, Co-owner of Union Square Cafe and past director of culinary services for the Union Square Hospitality Group discloses how his fascination with Japanese cuisine began in a spotless kitchen in Tokyo during an international food competition.



**14. Marcus Samuelsson**

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*“Cooking is similar to being a fashion designer—I'm always working one season ahead.”*

Owner/Chef of the Red Rooster and past Executive Chef of Aquavit recalls how the Japanese chefs he met throughout his career influenced him in adapting Asian cuisine and ingredients.



**15. Suvir Saran**

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*“Japanese chefs think about subtle flavors-Indian chefs think about drama.”*

Chef/past-owner of Dévi, New York City, and Consultant describes his first visit to Japan, the new dishes he had the opportunity to enjoy, and the ways they influenced his style of Indian cooking.



**16. Yosuke Suga**

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*“Young cooks need to understand that if they keep moving around from restaurant to restaurant, nobody will take a chance on them.”*

Past Executive Chef, L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon at the Four Seasons Hotel, New York City, describes how he landed a coveted cook's job in Joël Robuchon's Paris test kitchen.



**17. Noriyuki Sugie**

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*“The challenge is for chefs to show their uniqueness.”*

Past Executive Chef, Asiate, Mandarin Oriental, New York, explains similarities between French and Japanese cuisine and recounts what he learned from masters, such as Chef Yutaka Ishinabe (the “Iron Chef”) and Charlie Trotter.



**18. Toshio Suzuki**

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*“Thinking about ingredients flexibly can lead to important discoveries.”*

Owner/Chef of Sushi Zen, New York City, tells about his philosophical approach to cooking and the challenges he faced when opening his restaurant in New York City.



**19. Shinichiro Takagi**

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*“The most important skill of a chef is to never stop thinking about how to make the guests happy.”*

Owner/Chef of Zeniya in Kanazawa Japan describes his career path from working at Kitcho, where he learned the highest culinary skills from Master Chef Tokuoka, to running one of Kanazawa’s most popular restaurants.



**20. James Wierzelewski**

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*“The closer I can get my chefs to the source a/the ingredients and to the origin a/the cuisine, the more they will walk away with, and the more the restaurant will benefit.”*

Past Executive Chef at the New York Marriott Marquis, Harrods in London, and other hotel restaurants describes his philosophy of “eater-tainment” and his quest for unusual Japanese ingredients and cooking methods, which he successfully employs in large venues.



**21. Barry Wine**

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*“My goal was to blend constant change with consistency.”*

Owner/Chef of The Quilted Giraffe shares how he combined Japanese and American food ingredients, exquisite Japanese dishware, and a tasting menu concept to create unforgettable New York dining experiences in the 1980s.



**22. Lee Anne Wong**

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*“People used to say, ‘Go to cooking school to stay out of trouble and to stay out of jail.’ Now it's a glamorous thing.”*

Independent chef, consultant, and producer of *Top Chef* reveals the challenges of her diverse career, from coordinating French Culinary Institute cooking events to reaching the semi-finals on *Top Chef*.

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