

# The Creation of a Dish

## By Deanna

What is a signature dish? “A signature dish is a recipe that identifies an individual chef” (wikipedia).

Chefs combine different elements to form a unique dish whether it be a certain vegetable, spice, or technique used in creating that specific food.

Cooking has been a necessity throughout the ages. Stories have been passed generation to generation about cooking styles and how to cook certain foods. Food preparation is an important part in survival, because food needs to be cooked or otherwise readied for consumption. Without cooking, people can catch food poisoning and other sicknesses much more easily. Because of the importance of having food, cultures have always made their cultural centers based on areas that they get their food from. In ancient cultures, villages would often be formed around arid farmland because farmers formed most of the population. Nowadays American culture is based around large cities with supermarkets and trade centers being the central hub.

Before refrigerators existed, people had to figure out clever ways to store food without it going bad. One of those techniques was curing and brining with salt. The food (in most cases meats) would be coated in salts that could have seasonings added, and kept in jars or wrapped cloths and allowed to cure. Another method is to dry slices of meat in the sun, and make a jerky that had a much longer shelf life than when merely raw or cooked.

Today we use refrigerators in order to preserve our food and we use salt for flavor more than anything. In the culinary industry, chefs and chefs in training learn and gain a better understanding for all of the spices used in cooking, like how to make a spice work in a certain way to meld with another to creating a popping sensation, or even a subtle sweetness that once it hits your tongue it just melts in your mouth. Where does one get their inspiration and love of food from? A guest on F-Word said, “Well my grandmother

was a cook house keeper and my father was a baker in Edinburgh for 30 years, so there was a lot of cooking in my family" (Gordon Ramsay).

I received inspiration from my grandmother as well as my chef instructor Betty Ewing. During the past two years she has helped me learn skills and encouraged me to proceed and to not be afraid to make mistakes. Gordon Ramsay is another idol I have when it comes to cooking. I watch his shows and absorb the information he gives during the episodes.

“[I get my ideas from] eating out, off to France, off to Italy. You know it’s important to read and look through menus—quite inspirational. Sometimes when I’m on my own 3-4 in the morning, its concentration ad bang it’ll come and it’ll click and you’ll go to bed with that thought. You’ll wake up the next day and start asking questions,” (Gordon Ramsay, Beyond Boiling Point).

Gordon Ramsay has many restaurants around the world, in the UK there is a show called Beyond Boiling Point which shows some about his life in the kitchen and how he handles the pressure and keeping his personal life together as well. In this show, he goes through a process of creating a Jon Dori dish with roasted scallops. The cameraman asked how he come up with ideas to try in his restaurant and he replied with that quote. The way he tests the dishes to see if they will pass for people wanting to eat them, he will put them on the lunch menu as a special and see how well it sells. Gordon looks at others menus and try to see how it would work together, flavor wise, presentation wise and just over all greatness and then use those ideas to come up with something new and exciting for him to use.

During the twelve years Betty Ewing has been teaching at Los Altos High School, she has taught about sanitation and safety in the kitchen, and also how to invent one dish out of another. If we saw a recipe that we found interesting we were allowed to use it, on the condition that we had to change it to make it our own. We make it so it fits better into our "flavor thesis," or the general type of flavors we decide to use. Naturally, being a first

year student I was far from perfect at creating perfect items. As we learned, Betty would always provide us with positive feedback; “Remember, you can always add but never take away.” This is probably one of the most useful culinary comments I will ever use.

Experimentation isn't just about finding the perfect flavors in a dish, it is also about taking it to a new level and giving it that an extra kick to make it sensational. In my dish, I made ravioli. My sister is lactose intolerant, so I made it so that she could eat it as well. It was hard to get the perfect texture of the filling because I couldn't use any of the Italian cheeses that are used. I found some substitutes by using rice Parmesan and rice mozzarella. It worked out well, I needed to change the recipe I had found originally to match her needs and also taste great. I made it four times before but each time I always thought it was missing something. I had wondered what could I do t make it better. I got input from my family and a couple friends but I still wasn't able to get the taste I had wanted. I thought that in all of the attempts, the dish needed a kick, something that will make it 'pop'.

A friend of mine had come into the class with some outside experience from working in a kitchen during the summer. In class each person had to make a dish that would be taste tested. It was our final for the fish unit. My class used mostly salmon as their choice of fish. He didn't have a recipe that used salmon. When he got to class the day of the final he picked out some spices and started by creating a dry rub and rubbing it on the fish then pan frying it. His result was a rather simple dish but it had the flavors needed to make it really good. If he put a little bit too much of something he balanced it by adding more of another to counteract or make the flavors more mild. Learning how to correct mistakes is a key part in the experimentation aspect of cooking.

On Gordon Ramsay's show the F-word he has all of these different dishes that are made by a group of five people that are brought into the kitchen, not chefs, average people who can cook, well hopefully. He also goes head to head with a person who thinks they can cook better than him; he even battled his own mother! He made a tortellini dish, and showed how he made the dough and showed what the texture should be like. As he

was making the dough she said,

“The secret behind making a good pasta is not allowing it to dry out, so you really have to move you’re ass.” I watched the process of how he makes the tortellini and compared it to my own process.

He starts off with taking his four, eggs and olive oil and put all three of them into a food processor, getting it to a point where it’s like crumbs. He takes them out of the food processor and kneads the dough for two to three minutes until smooth and elastic. I on the other hand take the ingredients and just put them in a mixer, letting it mix together. Mine gets sticky and then I have to knead it for 5 to 10 minutes until it doesn’t stick to my hand or the board. After Chef Ramsay is done kneading his dough he wraps it tightly in saran wrap and chills it for 30 minutes, I don’t. Then I have to roll out all of the dough a little at a time until thin enough to use, he uses a pasta machine getting it to the perfect thickness.

Chefs everywhere have to create their own dish or take an older dish and tweak it to something new and amazing.

After one has finished the experimentation aspect of the dish now it comes to presentation. Presentation is where the chefs take the food that they have created and turned it into something amazing on the plate. There are certain things that have to be done before serving a dish due to standards of a certain restaurant. In a fine dining restaurant the chefs have to make sure the plates are warm before serving the food, the color and positioning are balanced nicely and the food actually tastes good.

La Riviera is a French restaurant in Scotland. Luke is the head chef, trained under two and three Michelin star restaurants in France and the other staff members are trained under Michelin star restaurants as well. David, a food inspector, was asked by Gordon Ramsay to come into the restaurant and have some of the food. He came in and ate two dishes. One was made by Ramsay himself and the other by Luke. Both were presented to

David at the same time. His critique of Luke's dish was “some of the flavors were over complicated to be frank about it. It’s a case of less is actually more. This dish was over garnished.”(Gordon Ramsay )

For two days I worked in a high end restaurant, Fleur de Lys in Las Vegas, experience the work that is done on a line. While I was there with a couple other students, I was learning how to make some of the dishes and make them presentable to serve. For each of the different salads I was making, like a Tuna Tartar, I had to make the little salads that go on top of the tartar. A couple times when I was getting used to the portions I had added a little bit too much of the salad at once. It looked like a tower on top of this small dish. I learned how to proportion things better as I worked later in the day. When it comes to presentation, the head chef has to check everything before it goes out. Each dish is checked, wiped off and called to take it away once it has been done.

Being a chef takes a lot of work and shouldn’t be taken lightly. Most of the people who are into the culinary industry love food and have a great passion to please the customer and make desirable dishes to eat.