



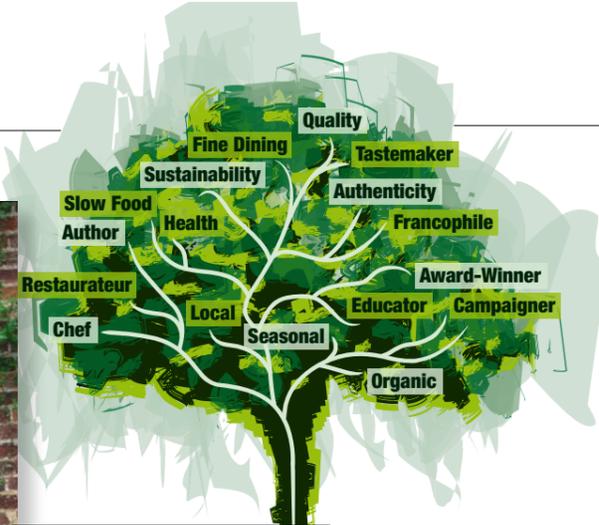
# TASTE Maker

After almost 40 years of advocating healthy, organic food, iconic American chef,



ALICE WATERS is considered to be one of the groundbreakers in the concept of green cuisine

Alice Waters, is still as passionate as ever about her “delicious revolution”



**ALICE WATERS'** many different influences have led to her becoming much more than just a chef



PHOTOS THE NEWYORKTIMES/REDUX/LAIF (2), CORBIS (1), MARTIN POPE/CAMERA PRESS/PICTUREPRESS (3) ILLUSTRATION FLORIAN WAGNER

“ Things grow and die, then grow again – it’s optimistic ”



**TRACING A MEAL** from the garden to the plate is of utmost importance

Alice Waters floats in rare air. Above the hustle and clang of the kitchens occupied by the best chefs in the United States, she is the country’s reigning grande dame of cuisine.

“I’m standing in my garden right now. I’m eating raspberries – they’re the best ones of the year,” says the American food icon and founder of California cuisine, indirectly dispensing part of her philosophy. “It’s so nourishing to be in nature – there’s a rhythm there that connects you with it. Things grow and die, then grow again – it’s optimistic.”

For the uninitiated, Alice Waters founded California’s landmark restaurant, Chez Panisse, in Berkeley, in 1971, and has spent the succeeding decades reaching beyond her kitchen in an attempt to fundamentally change the way America thinks about food. Former icon Julia Child inspired Americans to create unforgettable meals through her landmark cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, and

a series of smart, approachable public television cooking shows. Californian MFK Fisher explained how to take good food and “Serve It Forth” while legitimising food-writing as a form of literature. Waters promotes a lifestyle; she traces the arc of a meal from the garden to the table, explaining why every step along the way is crucial. In short, food must be local, organic, prepared with and served to good company.

“We’ve been told by fast-food culture that [taking time to prepare a meal] is not fun,” Waters says, “but there’s nothing I’d rather do than wash lettuce.”

At times, her conviction can sound ludicrous – some critics might say she’s been wandering around on her own little island in the near 40 years since Chez Panisse opened its doors ... unless you’re talking with her, at which point, it all just makes sense. Who wouldn’t want food that tastes better and isn’t treated with chemicals? After a lifetime of hard supermarket tomatoes, the perfectly ripe, garden-grown peach she’s always talking about really is fantastic. After an interview with Waters, I try to figure out a way to grow pesticide-free vegetables by hanging planters outside the window of my sixth-floor Paris apartment and spend a fruitless half hour online trying to devise a way to compost in a city that doesn’t.

Though she is still the face of Chez Panisse and is ostensibly promoting her new book, *The Art of Simple Food: Notes, Lessons, and Recipes from a Delicious Revolution*, Waters doesn’t really talk about either during the interview. In a sense, she doesn’t need to; by now, she’s built up so much momentum with her ‘delicious revolution’ that her book and restaurant take care of themselves.

“I’m not trying to tell people how to live,” she explains, “I’d rather the change I want to make be to cook the simple food we need to be cooking in this country.”

It’s an uphill battle. America is, after all, the land of the free and the home of the Big Mac. Obesity is rife. Family meals are an endangered species and the microwave is king.

“There’s a rhythm to [the fast-food lifestyle] – it’s like we’re in bumper cars,” she says, “but life goes by too quickly to live like this.

“You have to not let those things be in your way,” she explains. “I want to cook something in a minute and eat ... but I have a tomato confit in my pantry ... and I have some pasta ... and I have some herbs in the garden. I can make a meal in ten minutes. I can put some salad on

my plate, cook a little piece of fish, boil some potatoes. You have to have a pantry. You have to have some basic techniques and a few things, but it’s so gratifying ... Later, I’ll take fresh mint and pour hot water over it and I have mint tea.”

Her optimism is contagious. Chez Panisse has produced chefs like Paul Bertolli, who now runs Berkeley’s Fra’Mani Handcrafted Salumi, Judy Rogers of San Francisco’s Zuni Café and Jonathan Waxman, who has opened restaurants in California, New York and London. The Revolution According to Alice also means teaching school students about food, from the garden to the table, in her Edible Schoolyard programme and working with schools across the country to get cafeteria lunches to be both healthy and nurturing.

Kids, says Waters, are one of the keys to making sure the changes continue, because it’s easier to get them to the ‘aha!’ moment when they understand what she’s trying to teach. “It’s harder to get adults to that place; it’s easier when they’re younger. Children are open and eager and want to be connected to nature.”

It can appear that Waters lives in some sort of organic, affordable la-la land that more closely resembles the Hobbits’ Shire in Middle Earth than anything on Planet Earth, but at the very least she lives her dream and has swayed millions of Americans to give her lifestyle a try. Once they get a taste of the good life, Alice bets they won’t go back.

“It’s a seduction to bring people to biodiversity through pleasure,” she says convincingly. “I want to give them a taste to wake them up.

“This isn’t like studying and doing something painful. This is finding another world of beauty, a different fabric of life. It’s very profound and terribly, terribly important,” she emphasises. “It’s something we all have to learn again.”

At some point a few days after the interview is over, I’m rushing, I’m still working and I need to eat, pronto. I catch myself putting together a ‘food as fuel’ meal that would cause Alice to twitch, catch myself and adjust. I add some fresh-chopped coriander to my salad and doctor my stock vinaigrette by adding lime juice and soy sauce – it’s good. For my pasta, I pull the noodles from the boiling water while they’re still crunchy (a full minute or two earlier than I usually would) and Sicilian-style, finish cooking them in the ‘sauce’ I make by bubbling chopped tomatoes with clove of garlic. Total extra cooking time? Thirty seconds, if that.

It’s so tasty, I decide to celebrate with a cup of mint tea.

Joe Ray

**THE NEXT GENERATION**

- ROLL CALL:** a short list of *Chez Panisse* alumni who have successfully followed in the footsteps of Alice Waters.
- MARY CANALES, ICI ICE CREAM**  
If wildflower honey ice cream doesn’t get you curious ...  
2948 College Ave, Berkeley, CA  
[ici-icecream.com](http://ici-icecream.com)
- PAUL BERTOLLI, FRA’MANI SALUMI**  
Handcrafted salumi.  
1311 Eighth Street, Berkeley, CA  
[framani.com](http://framani.com)
- CHRISTOPHER LEE, ECCOLO**  
A product-first trattoria Italian.  
1820 Fourth Street, Berkeley, CA  
[eccolo.com](http://eccolo.com)
- RUSSELL MOORE, CAMINO**  
The website gives the hours and the daily menu. A random pick shows fresh black-eyed peas, shellbeans and rapini with artichokes and egg cooked by the fire. I’m in.  
3917 Grand Ave, Oakland, CA  
[caminorestaurant.com](http://caminorestaurant.com)
- SUZANNE GOIN, LUCQUES**  
Lucques is a restaurant named after an olive. Crispy belly pork with peaches and special Sunday dinners keep customers returning.  
8474 Melrose Ave, Los Angeles, CA  
[lucques.com](http://lucques.com)
- AMARYLL SCHWERTNER, BOULETTES LARDER**  
Half stockist of your dreams, half product-centric restaurant, but whole home cooking. What more is needed?  
1 Ferry Building, San Francisco, CA  
[bouletteslarder.com](http://bouletteslarder.com)
- JUDY RODGERS, ZUNI CAFÉ**  
Mediterranean inspiration and a Bay Area classic in its own right.  
1658 Market Street San Francisco, CA  
[zunicafe.com](http://zunicafe.com)