

in his New York City restaurant, An American Place. Other chefs quickly followed suit, and soon chefs across the continent made names for themselves and their restaurants at least in part by emphasizing good-quality local ingredients. Half a century ago, nearly all the most respected chefs working in the United States and Canada were European-born. Today, the movement begun by the pioneering quality-oriented chefs of the 1970s and 1980s has fostered a great number of creative North American-born chefs who are among the most respected in the world.

The public has benefited greatly from these efforts. Today, in supermarkets as well as in restaurants, a much greater variety of high-quality foods is available than there was 40 or 50 years ago. Many chefs have modified their cooking styles to highlight the natural flavors and textures of their ingredients, and their menus are often simpler now for this reason.

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES

After the middle of the twentieth century, as travel became easier and as new waves of immigrants arrived in Europe and North America from around the world, awareness of and taste for regional dishes grew. Chefs became more knowledgeable not only about the traditional cuisines of other parts of Europe but about those of Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere. Many of the most creative chefs have been inspired by these cuisines and use some of their techniques and ingredients. For example, many North American and French chefs, looking for ways to make their cooking lighter and more elegant, have found ideas in the cuisine of Japan. In the southwestern United States, a number of chefs have transformed Mexican influences into an elegant and original cooking style. Throughout North America, traditional dishes and regional specialties combine the cooking traditions of immigrant settlers and the indigenous ingredients of a bountiful land. For many years, critics often argued that menus in most North American restaurants offered the same monotonous, mediocre food. In recent decades, however, American and Canadian cooks have rediscovered traditional North American dishes.

The use of ingredients and techniques from more than one regional, or international, cuisine in a single dish is known as *fusion cuisine*. Early attempts to prepare fusion cuisine often produced poor results because the dishes were not true to any one culture and were too mixed up. This was especially true in the 1980s, when the idea of fusion cuisine was new. Cooks often combined ingredients and techniques without a good feeling for how they would work together. The result was sometimes a jumbled mess. But chefs who have taken the time to study in depth the cuisines and cultures they borrow from have brought new excitement to cooking and to restaurant menus.

Today chefs make good use of all the ingredients and techniques available to them. It is almost second nature to give extra depth to the braising liquid for a beef pot roast by adding Mexican ancho chiles, for example, or to include Thai basil and lemongrass in a seafood salad. In the recipe sections of this book, classic dishes from many regions of the world are included among more familiar recipes from home. To help you understand these recipes and the cuisines they come from, background information accompanies many of them. The international recipes are identified in the Recipe Contents.

CATERINA DE MEDICI

The Medicis were a powerful Italian family that ruled Florence from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century and provided, in addition to the rulers of Florence, three popes and two queens of France.

Until recently, the accepted and often-told story is that when Caterina de Medici went to France in 1533 to marry the future King Henry II, she brought with her a staff of cooks as part of her household. This introduction of Italian cooking practices into France supposedly changed and modernized the cooking not only of France but of all of Western Europe. According to this story, Caterina and her Italian cooks should be credited with fostering modern cuisine.

When cookbooks and other culinary writings of the period are examined, however, it appears that French cooking didn't begin to modernize until at least a century later. During the hundred years after Caterina's arrival in France, no new, important cookbooks were written. There is no sign of a revolution in cooking. In fact, banquet menus that survive from the period are not much different from menus of the Middle Ages.

Banquets during the Middle Ages were like huge sit-down buffets. For each course, the table was loaded with large quantities of meats, poultry, and fish dishes, usually heavily spiced, and an assortment of side dishes and sweets. Diners generally ate only what they could reach. The course was then removed and another course, also meats and side dishes, was loaded onto the table. Again, each person ate only a fraction of the dishes present, depending on what was within reach.

The modern idea of a menu in which everyone at the table eats the same dishes in the same order did not appear until the 1700s.

So it is not historically accurate to give the Italian princess Caterina credit for modernizing French cuisine. On the other hand, it is fair to say she and her offspring brought more refined manners and elegance to European dining rooms. Italian innovations included the use of the fork as well as greater cleanliness in general. An additional Italian contribution was the invention of sophisticated pastries and desserts.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

As described on page 4, new technologies, from transportation to food processing, had a profound effect on cooking in the twentieth century. Such changes continue today, with scientific developments that are only beginning to have an effect on how cooks think about food and menus.

One of these technologies is the practice of cooking *sous vide* (soo veed, French for “under vacuum”). *Sous vide* began simply as a method for packaging and storing foods in vacuum-sealed plastic bags. Modern chefs, however, are exploring ways to use this technology to control cooking temperatures and times with extreme precision. As a result, familiar foods have emerged with new textures and flavors. (*Sous vide* cooking is discussed further in Chapter 4.)

Another approach to cooking precision was pioneered by the Spanish chef Ferran Adrià in his acclaimed restaurant, El Bulli. Adrià explores new possibilities in gels, foams, powders, infusions, extracts, and other unexpected ways of presenting flavors, textures, and aromas. This approach to cooking is called *molecular gastronomy*, a name coined by the French chemist Hervé This, who has done much of the research in the field. Molecular gastronomy has been taken up by Heston Blumenthal in England, Wylie Dufresne, Grant Achatz, and Homaro Cantu in North America, and other chefs who continue to experiment and to explore what science and technology can contribute to food and food presentation. Many of the techniques make use of unfamiliar ingredients, such as natural gums, and put familiar ingredients, such as gelatin and pectin, to unfamiliar uses. Although this approach to cooking may be best known for its unusual ingredients and techniques, its finest chefs are focused on the food, treating the techniques primarily as new tools in the chef’s repertoire.

Cooking and cooking styles continue to change. Men and women are needed who can adapt to these changes and respond to new challenges. Although automation and convenience foods will no doubt grow in importance, imaginative chefs who can create new dishes and develop new techniques and styles will always be needed, as will skilled cooks who can apply both old and new techniques to produce high-quality foods in all kinds of facilities, from restaurants and hotels to schools and hospitals.

The Organization of Modern Kitchens

The Basis of Kitchen Organization

The purpose of kitchen organization is to assign or allocate tasks so they can be done efficiently and properly and so all workers know what their responsibilities are.

The way a kitchen is organized depends on several factors.

1. The menu.

The kinds of dishes to be produced obviously determine the jobs that must be done. The menu is, in fact, the basis of the entire operation. Because of its importance, we devote a whole chapter to a study of the menu (Chapter 5).

2. The type of establishment.

The major types of food-service establishments are as follows:

- Hotels
- Institutional kitchens
 - Schools
 - Hospitals, nursing homes, and other health care institutions
 - Employee lunchrooms and executive dining rooms
 - Airline catering
 - Military food service
 - Correctional institutions
- Private clubs
- Catering and banquet services
- Fast-food restaurants

KEY POINTS TO REVIEW

- How have the following developments changed the food-service industry: development of new equipment; availability of new food products; greater understanding of food safety and nutrition?
- How have international cuisines influenced and changed cooking in North America?

- Carry-out or take-out food facilities, including supermarkets
 - Full-service restaurants
3. The size of the operation (the number of customers and the volume of food served).
 4. The physical facilities, including the equipment in use.

The Classical Brigade

As you learned earlier in this chapter, one of Escoffier's important achievements was the reorganization of the kitchen. This reorganization divided the kitchen into departments, or stations, based on the kinds of foods produced. A station chef was placed in charge of each department. In a small operation, the station chef might be the only worker in the department. But in a large kitchen, each station chef might have several assistants.

This system, with many variations, is still in use, especially in large hotels with traditional kinds of food service. The major positions are as follows:

1. The *chef* is the person in charge of the kitchen. In large establishments, this person has the title of *executive chef*. The executive chef is a manager who is responsible for all aspects of food production, including menu planning, purchasing, costing, planning work schedules, hiring, and training.
2. If a food-service operation is large, with many departments (for example, a formal dining room, a casual dining room, and a catering department), or if it has several units in different locations, each kitchen may have a *chef de cuisine*. The chef de cuisine reports to the executive chef.
3. The *sous chef* (*soo shef*) is directly in charge of production and works as the assistant to the executive chef or chef de cuisine. (The word *sous* is French for "under.") Because the executive chef's responsibilities may require a great deal of time in the office, the sous chef takes command of the actual production and the minute-by-minute supervision of the staff.
4. The *station chefs*, or *chefs de partie*, are in charge of particular areas of production. The following are the most important station chefs.
 - The *sauce chef*, or *saucier* (*so-see-ay*), prepares sauces, stews, and hot hors d'oeuvres, and sautéed foods to order. This is usually the highest position of all the stations.
 - The *fish cook*, or *poissonier* (*pwah-so-nyay*), prepares fish dishes. In some kitchens, this station is handled by the saucier.
 - The *vegetable cook*, or *entremetier* (*awn-truh-met-yay*), prepares vegetables, soups, starches, and eggs. Large kitchens may divide these duties among the vegetable cook, the fry cook, and the soup cook.
 - The *roast cook*, or *rôtisseur* (*ro-tee-sur*), prepares roasted and braised meats and their gravies and broils meats and other items to order. A large kitchen may have a separate *broiler cook*, or *grillardin* (*gree-ar-dan*), to handle the broiled items. The broiler cook may also prepare deep-fried meats and fish.
 - The *pantry chef*, or *garde manger* (*gard mawn-zhay*), is responsible for cold foods, including salads and dressings, pâtés, cold hors d'oeuvres, and buffet items.
 - The *pastry chef*, or *pâtissier* (*pa-tees-syay*), prepares pastries and desserts.
 - The *relief cook*, *swing cook*, or *tournant* (*toor-nawn*), replaces other station heads.
 - The *expediter*, or *aboyeur* (*ah-bwa-yer*), accepts orders from waiters and passes them on to the cooks on the line. The expediter also calls for orders to be finished and plated at the proper time and inspects each plate before passing it to the dining room staff. In many restaurants, this position is taken by the head chef or the sous chef.

5. *Cooks and assistants* in each station or department help with the duties assigned to them. For example, the assistant vegetable cook may wash, peel, and trim vegetables. With experience, assistants may be promoted to station cooks and then to station chefs.

Modern Kitchen Organization

As you can see, only a large establishment needs a staff like the classical brigade just described. In fact, some large hotels have even larger staffs, with other positions such as separate day and night sous chefs, assistant chef, banquet chef, butcher, baker, and so on.

Most modern operations, on the other hand, are smaller than this. The size of the classical brigade may be reduced simply by combining two or more positions where the workload allows it. For example, the *second cook* may combine the duties of the sauce cook, fish cook, soup cook, and vegetable cook.

A typical medium-size operation may employ a chef, a second cook, a broiler cook, a pantry cook, and a few cooks' helpers.

A *working chef* is in charge of operations not large enough to have an executive chef. In addition to being in charge of the kitchen, the working chef also handles one of the production stations. For example, he or she may handle the sauté station, plate foods during service, and help on other stations when needed.

Small kitchens may have only a chef, one or two cooks, and perhaps one or two assistants to handle simple jobs such as washing and peeling vegetables. Cooks who prepare or finish hot à la carte items during service in a restaurant may be known as *line cooks*. Line cooks are said to be on the hot line, or simply on the line.

In many small operations, the *short-order cook* is the backbone of the kitchen during service time. This cook may handle the broiler, deep fryer, griddle, sandwich production, and even some sautéed items. In other words, the short-order cook's responsibility is the preparation of foods that are quickly prepared to order.

One special type of short-order cook is the *breakfast cook*. This worker is skilled at quickly and efficiently turning out egg dishes and other breakfast items to order.

By contrast, establishments such as school cafeterias may do no cooking to order at all. Stations and assignments are based on the requirements of quantity preparation rather than cooking to order.

Skill Levels

The preceding discussion is necessarily general because there are so many kinds of kitchen organizations. Titles vary also. The responsibilities of the worker called the *second cook*, for example, are not necessarily the same in every establishment. Escoffier's standardized system has evolved in many directions.

One title that is often misunderstood and much abused is *chef*. The general public tends to refer to anyone with a white hat as a chef, and people who like to cook for guests in their homes refer to themselves as amateur chefs.

Strictly speaking, the term *chef* is reserved for one who is *in charge of a kitchen* or a part of a kitchen. The word *chef* is French for "chief" or "head." Studying this book will not make you a chef. The title must be earned by experience not only in preparing food but also in managing a staff and in planning production. New cooks who want to advance in their careers know they must always use the word *chef* with respect.

Skills required of food production personnel vary not only with the job level but also with the establishment and the kind of food prepared. The director of a hospital kitchen and the head chef in a luxury restaurant need different skills. The skills needed by a short-order cook in a coffee shop are not exactly the same as those needed by a production worker in a school cafeteria. Nevertheless, we can group skills into three general categories.

1. Supervisory.

The head of a food-service kitchen, whether called *executive chef*, *head chef*, *working chef*, or *dietary director*, must have management and supervisory skills as well as a thorough knowledge of food production. Leadership positions require an individual

who understands organizing and motivating people, planning menus and production procedures, controlling costs and managing budgets, and purchasing food supplies and equipment. Even if he or she does no cooking at all, the chef must be an experienced cook in order to schedule production, instruct workers, and control quality. Above all, the chef must be able to work well with people, even under extreme pressure.

2. Skilled and technical.

While the chef is the head of an establishment, the cooks are the backbone. These workers carry out the actual food production. Thus, they must have knowledge of and experience in cooking techniques, at least for the dishes made in their own department. In addition, they must be able to function well with their fellow workers and to coordinate with other departments. Food production is a team activity.

3. Entry level.

Entry-level jobs in food service usually require no particular skills or experience. Workers in these jobs are assigned such work as washing vegetables and preparing salad greens. As their knowledge and experience increase, they may be given more complex tasks and eventually become skilled cooks. Many executive chefs began their careers as pot washers who got a chance to peel potatoes when the pot sink was empty.

Beginning in an entry-level position and working one's way up with experience is the traditional method of advancing in a food-service career. Today, however, many cooks are graduates of culinary schools and programs. But even with such an education, many new graduates begin at entry-level positions. This is as it should be and certainly should not be seen as discouragement. Schools teach general cooking knowledge, while every food-service establishment requires specific skills according to its own menu and its own procedures. Experience as well as theoretical knowledge is needed to be able to adapt to real-life working situations. However, students who have studied and learned well should be able to work their way up more rapidly than beginners with no knowledge at all.

Other Professional Opportunities

Not all those who train to be professional culinarians end up in restaurant careers. Professional cooking expertise is valuable in many callings. The following are just a few of the employment opportunities available in addition to standard cooking positions. Most of these require advanced training in other fields in addition to food production.

- Hospitality management in hotels, restaurants, large catering companies, and other organizations with a food-service component.
- Product development and research for food manufacturers.
- Product sales representatives for food and beverage distributors.
- Product sales representatives for equipment companies.
- Restaurant design and consulting.
- Food styling for photography in books, magazines, and other publications, as well as for food packaging and marketing materials.
- Food writing for newspapers, magazines, food industry journals, and other publications—not only restaurant criticism but analysis and reporting on food-related topics such as nutrition and health, agriculture, and food supply.
- Training the next generation of chefs in culinary schools and in large hospitality companies with in-house training programs.

Standards of Professionalism

What does it take to be a good food-service worker?

The emphasis of a food-service education is on learning a set of skills. But in many ways, *attitudes* are more important than skills because a good attitude will help you not only learn skills but also persevere and overcome the many difficulties you will face.

The successful food-service worker follows an unwritten code of behavior and set of attitudes we call *professionalism*. Let's look at some of the qualities a professional must have.

Positive Attitude Toward the Job

To be a good professional cook, you have to like cooking and want to do it well. Being serious about your work doesn't mean you can't enjoy it. But the enjoyment comes from the satisfaction of doing your job well and making everything run smoothly.

Every experienced chef knows the stimulation of the rush. When it's the busiest time of the evening, the orders are coming in so fast you can hardly keep track of them, and every split second counts—then, when everyone digs in and works together and everything clicks, there's real excitement in the air. But this excitement comes only when you work for it.

A cook with a positive attitude works quickly, efficiently, neatly, and safely. Professionals have pride in their work and want to make sure it is something to be proud of.

Pride in your work and in your profession is important, but humility is important too, especially when you are starting out. Sometimes new culinary school graduates arrive on the job thinking they know everything. Remember that learning to cook and learning to manage a kitchen is a lifelong process and that you are not yet qualified to be executive chef.

The importance of a professional attitude begins even before you start your first job. The standard advice for a successful job interview applies to cooks as well as to office professionals: Dress and behave not for the group you belong to but for the group you want to join. Arrive neat, clean, appropriately dressed, and on time. Get noticed for the right reasons. Carry this attitude through every day on the job.

Staying Power

Food service requires physical and mental stamina, good health, and a willingness to work hard. It is hard work. The pressure can be intense and the hours long and grueling. You may be working evenings and weekends when everyone else is playing. And the work can be monotonous. You might think it's drudgery to hand-shape two or three dozen dinner rolls for your baking class, but wait until you get that great job in the big hotel and are told to make 3,000 canapés for a party.

Overcoming these difficulties requires a sense of responsibility and a dedication to your profession, to your coworkers, and to your customers or clients. Dedication also means staying with a job and not hopping from kitchen to kitchen every few months. Sticking with a job at least a year or two shows prospective employers you are serious about your work and can be relied on.

Ability to Work with People

Few of you will work in an establishment so small you are the only person on the staff. Food-service work is teamwork, and it's essential to be able to work well on a team and to cooperate with your fellow workers. You can't afford to let ego problems, petty jealousy, departmental rivalries, or feelings about other people get in the way of doing your job well. Today's kitchens hold people of many races, nationalities, and origins, some of whom speak languages different from yours. You have to be able to work on the same team as everyone. In the old days, many chefs were famous for their temper tantrums. Fortunately, self-control is more valued today.

Eagerness to Learn

There is more to learn about cooking than you will learn in a lifetime. The greatest chefs in the world are the first to admit they have more to learn, and they keep working, experimenting, and studying. The food-service industry is changing rapidly, so it is vital to be open to new ideas. No matter how good your techniques are, you might learn an even better way.

Continue to study and read. Seek extra work that gives you the opportunity to learn from people with more experience. For example, if you are working on the hot line in a restaurant, ask the pastry chef if you could come in early, on your own time, to help out and, in the process, gain new knowledge and experience.

Many culinary schools and programs have continuing education programs that can help you develop new skills. Professional associations such as the American Culinary Federation (ACF) and the International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP) provide opportunities for learning as well as for making contacts with other professionals. The ACF, as well as other professional organizations such as the Retail Bakers of America (RBA) and the International Food Service Executives Association (IFSEA), sponsor certification programs that document a professional's skill level and encourage ongoing study.

A Full Range of Skills

Most people who become professional cooks do so because they like to cook. This is an important motivation, but it is also important to develop and maintain other skills necessary for the profession. To be successful, a cook must understand and manage food costs and other financial matters, manage and maintain proper inventories, deal with purveyors, and understand personnel management.

Experience

One of our most respected chefs said, "You don't really know how to cook a dish until you have done it a thousand times."

There is no substitute for years of experience. Studying cooking principles in books and in schools can get your career off to a running start. You may learn more about basic cooking theories from your chef instructors than you could in several years of working your way up from washing vegetables. But if you want to become an accomplished cook, you need practice, practice, and more practice. A diploma does not make you a chef.

Dedication to Quality

Many people think only a special category of food can be called *gourmet food*. It's hard to say exactly what that is. Apparently, the only thing so-called gourmet foods have in common is high price.

The only distinction worth making is between well-prepared food and poorly prepared food. There is good roast duckling à l'orange and there is bad roast duckling à l'orange. There are good hamburgers and French fries, and there are bad hamburgers and French fries.

Whether you work in a top restaurant, a fast-food restaurant, a college cafeteria, or a catering house, you can do your job well, or not. The choice is yours.

High quality doesn't necessarily mean high price. It costs no more to cook green beans properly than to overcook them. But in order to produce high-quality food, you must want to. It is not enough to simply know how.

Good Understanding of the Basics

Experimentation and innovation in cooking are the order of the day. Brilliant chefs are breaking old boundaries and inventing dishes that would have been unthinkable years ago. There is apparently no limit to what can be tried.

However, the chefs who seem to be most revolutionary are the first to insist on the importance of solid grounding in basic techniques and in the classic methods practiced since Escoffier's day. In order to innovate, you have to know where to begin.

As a beginner, knowing the basics will help you take better advantage of your experience. When you watch a practiced cook at work, you will understand better what you are seeing and will know what questions to ask. In order to play great music on the piano, you first must learn to play scales and exercises.

That's what this book is about. It's not a course in French cooking or American cooking or gourmet cooking or coffee shop cooking. It's a course in the basics. When you finish the book, you will not know everything. But you should be ready to take good advantage of the many rewarding years of food-service experience ahead of you.

KEY POINTS TO REVIEW

- What are the major stations in a classical kitchen? What are their responsibilities?
- How do the size and type of a food-service operation affect how the kitchen is organized?
- What are the three basic skill levels of modern kitchen personnel?
- What are eight personal characteristics that are important to the success of a food-service professional?

TERMS FOR REVIEW

Marie-Antoine Carême	executive chef	rôtisseur	working chef
Georges-Auguste Escoffier	chef de cuisine	grillardin	line cook
nouvelle cuisine	sous chef	garde manger	short-order cook
fusion cuisine	station chef	pâtissier	breakfast cook
sous vide	saucier	tournant	professionalism
molecular gastronomy	poissonier	expediter	
chef	entremetier	aboyeur	

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Escoffier is sometimes called the father of modern food service. What were his most important accomplishments?
2. Discuss several ways in which modern technology has changed the food-service industry.
3. Discuss how an emphasis on high-quality ingredients beginning in the late twentieth century has influenced cooks and cooking styles.
4. What is fusion cuisine? Discuss how successful chefs make use of international influences.
5. What is the purpose of kitchen organization? Is the classical system of organization developed by Escoffier the best for all types of kitchens? Why or why not?
6. True or false: A cook in charge of the sauce and sauté station in a large hotel must have supervisory skills as well as cooking skills. Explain your answer.
7. True or false: If a culinary arts student in a professional school studies hard, works diligently, gets top grades, and shows real dedication, he or she will be qualified to be a chef upon graduation. Explain your answer.