

# Ideas in Food



## 5 Factors Shaping Creativity in the Kitchen November 22, 2010

**1. Inspiration:** observing and absorbing the world around you, asking questions, maintaining a sense of wonder.

- Finding answers is easy, finding the right questions is the true challenge.
- Mistakes are just steps along the path to success.
- Understanding history allows us to change the future.
- Finding the hidden links between ideas allows us to build a chain of development.
- Recording ideas allows us to have access to earlier inspirations and use them in the future.
- Exercise your brain by exploring new interests and ideas to keep your mind flexible.
- Allow for the cross-pollination of ideas, we get new perspectives and inspirations when we share ideas with others.
- Cyclical pleasures, enjoy the different seasons of any ingredient/idea and celebrate each new ending and beginning.
- Find balance between science and nature, if you can make them work together you can do anything.
- Juxtapose flavors, temperatures, textures, aromas so that each dish is a constantly changing experience that engages the diner and keeps them involved and excited in a meal.
- Match disparate ingredients. Don't be afraid of trying unconventional pairings. You never know what will happen or how good something can be until you try it.
- Understand and identify relationships. Potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants are all part of the same family and go well together.

**2. Flexibility:** the ability to change perspectives on a dime. Looking at ideas backwards, forwards and upside-down. Separation of ego and invention: understanding that you will not necessarily invent the big idea but having the ability to identify it and extrapolate it will be more important than being the person who creates it.

- Sharing ideas leads to new perspectives, which in turn leads to more ideas to be embraced and shared anew.
- Build a repertoire of techniques and ideas. Have confidence in your creations and own them. Just because they may have sprung from someone else's inspiration doesn't detract from your own evolution.

- Organize your ideas because it will make it easier to access them and utilize your creativity.
- Choose your goal. Decide what you want to work on or work with and explore it to the best of your ability.
- Water is always available. It can be used to dilute flavor to make it approachable, like a splash in your glass of scotch or it can be used to change textures, like rehydrating freeze dried fruit. It's also important to know when not to use water because you want to add flavor instead of subtract.
- Know when to close the door. Sometimes you're just wasting time. If a dish isn't working, know when to walk away and try something completely different.
- Realize that most mysteries are lack of knowledge.
- Use your subconscious. Pay attention to random thoughts and dreams.

**3. Motivation:** the desire to create must be stronger than fear of failure. Throwing spaghetti on the wall knowing that you can always clean up the mess later.

- Creativity is an attitude. View life as an explorer looking for opportunities and relationships, pay attention to small details and occasionally step back to see the big picture.
- Every finish line is also a starting point.
- Know your own taste and establish a clear voice.
- Allow the ingredients to inspire you.
- Pay attention to sensory experiences. Taste and memory are intertwined and certain textures and flavors resonate with certain populations. Utilize sensations to increase flavor and improve the dining experience.
- Enjoy the moment. Food peaks quickly and then deteriorates.
- Spontaneity is facilitated by constant rehearsal of skill sets. Ability allows for creativity.
- Every "overnight" success is the result of hard work.
- Structure allows for creativity. Having too many options can be paralyzing. Embrace parameters because they can actually allow for more creativity.

**4. Adaptation:** the ability to learn from your mistakes, successes and all of the bumps in the road on the way.

- Focus your energy. It's easy to be distracted by ideas and lose your way. Jot down new ideas but always keep the end goal in mind.
- Establish your own set of rules to work by but don't be afraid to change them if the situation calls for flexibility.
- Many times the smallest detail can affect the overall outcome. Calibration can make a big difference.
- Realize that there is always a right and wrong in cooking that it is determined by your standards. You choose what is right for you.
- Keep your audience in mind when composing a dish. Nobody cooks in a vacuum.
- Science can be art and vice versa. It all depends on your perspective.
- Realize that the description can be as important as the execution.
- Draw on past experiences and extrapolate.

- Don't just balance flavors on your tongue, use your nose and balance your aromas.
- Take advantage of your resources and use them whenever you can. They will only make you better.

**5. Refinement (Editing):** Knowing when to say when. Utilizing critical examination to determine when a preparation is at its peak, when a dish is done, when a technique works perfectly and when you need to do more. Being able to trim the fat and sharpen the edges to reveal the hidden treasure at its best advantage.

- Have a clear goal. Focus on delicious and always keep it in the back of your mind.
- Have a sense of urgency to move you forward. Use your energy wisely and don't spin your wheels if you can avoid it.
- Are your components working together or struggling against one another? Everything on a plate should taste good, eaten alone or together.
- Explore all your options and then narrow them down. Too much is too much.
- Subtlety is underappreciated. Big bold flavors are wonderful but so is finesse.
- Start with the best raw materials available and do your best not to screw them up.
- When using a filter remember that it produces two sets of ingredients that you can use.
- Trim the fat and remove any extraneous details that simply add noise to the plate.