ON FIRE
CULTURE • PASSION • INVENTION
Europe and the Americas

Napa Valley
April 20-22, 2016
Imagine this familiar scenario: Some friends are in town, and they want you to take them out to dinner. You make a reservation at the latest hot spot—not necessarily the fanciest restaurant you know, but certainly the most currently acclaimed among national media and locals. Your guests arrive, prepare for dinner, and on the way to the restaurant ask you what type of cuisine it is. You’re stumped, incapable of providing a clear answer. The only response that makes sense, really, is: “It’s the chef’s.”

Some variation on this answer is more and more common, no matter where in the world one might be, in cities large and small. Today, chefs are rediscovering the natural world and cultures closest to them, rather than always looking to far-away references. Culture is terroir, is identity, is place. From there, today’s chefs are developing their own vision and their own voice—going far beyond inscribing their dishes in a “national” repertoire, and instead creating unique culinary identities. As a result, how a top chef thinks and cooks in Mexico City cannot be what a peer might think and cook in Paris, Rome, or New Orleans.

So, what stimulates chefs’ creative processes? What sets their minds on fire? What alights their passion? What drives how they build their business models? How have gastronomic frameworks changed, and what shape do they now take? Where are the new frontiers of food, and what will American diners want to eat tomorrow? Navigating a changing landscape of opportunity, today’s chefs are challenged as never before to build and grow their personal visions, their artistic, entrepreneurial identities, and new strategies in ways that are mindful of the breadth of these choices. The Culinary Institute of America’s 18th Annual Worlds of Flavor® International Conference & Festival presents the insights and personal journeys of influential chefs from Europe, Latin America, and the United States, as we learn how they found their voice in this conversation about tradition and invention, who influenced them, and what is shaping their culinary vision for the future.

Where Kitchens Connected (CIA’s 16th Worlds of Flavor conference) looked at the external, increasingly global networks among chefs, On Fire examines internal, proximate networks—the ones that occur within a country, a culture, and a kitchen.
Vibrant, global food cultures draw strength and evolution from the passion of their most talented cooks and from communities who embrace excellence in craftsmanship. These groups are ever more frequently intersecting, as both internationally minded and indigenous cooks exchange knowledge and techniques in a way that places traditions more firmly in the global foodscape. Eating at one of Lima’s most acclaimed restaurants, for example, beyond providing a pleasurable gastronomic experience, also means learning about the topography, environment, and history of Peru through the foods consumed. The preservation of native ingredients also happens in collaboration between chefs, indigenous communities, anthropologists, and scientists, among others.

Like cultures, cuisines are not static. They evolve as art, fashion, and music do, based on the changing practices of those who dominate their production and the shifting preferences of those who enjoy their consumption. In the West, French cuisine was for very long the only reference of fine dining. It has since been displaced, as countries have developed their own versions of gastronomy and culinary excellence, looking inwardly. What has this shift done to France, and what is the new generation of chefs there doing these days? In which space do they operate and what are their 21st century points of reference? How do those apply to American chefs and foodservice operations, at a time when we are rediscovering French cuisine, and young American chefs are opening their own versions of bistros and brasseries in emerging neighborhoods from New York to San Francisco?

As chefs around the world look to the future, sources of inspiration for culinary identity, menu concepts, and flavor discovery are limitless. Much of this inspiration revolves around new possibilities that bridge tradition and invention. Rather than choosing whether to cook traditional or contemporary menus, they have the freedom (after having acquired enough knowledge) to offer their own spin, their own signature, their own homage to their roots. No longer an “either/or” proposition, tradition and invention come together harmoniously on the plate, thanks to customers who are more daring than ever, and less bound by long-held notions of status.
Old silos are breaking down between “high” and “low,” “fast” and “slow,” as chefs extend their reach and build new businesses. Street foods move onto upscale restaurant menus, and top chefs move into QSR and fast casual. Cultural and flavor hybrids entice the adventurous palates of Millennials and engage us all in considering what works, and what doesn’t. Dining is being redefined and reinvented: moderately priced multi-course tasting menus allow chefs to push creative boundaries for a wider range of customers than only those who could traditionally afford that model of dining; chefs who previously never considered anything other than fine dining are turning to fast casual and QSR to expand their businesses, in the process seeking to change supply chain models and push creativity in those sectors; young chefs are moving back to their hometowns or to smaller cities to open their own ventures after making a name for themselves in already-established culinary capitals.

**Europe** continues to be a site of culinary exploration that attracts both locals and food tourists from all over the world to destination restaurants and neighborhood gems. Perhaps nowhere else is the tension between tradition and invention greater, as chefs feature new expressions of ingredients and dishes that for decades could only be allowed to take one shape, asking diners to trust them and immerse themselves in the pleasure of discovering a new side to the familiar. Chefs are creatively balancing nuances of style and accessibility, global influences and local ingredients, as they work to craft next-generation European flavors.

One of the most dynamic revolutions in gastronomy is taking place throughout **Latin America**, as the culinary scene explodes with pride at the bounty of its ingredients. Chefs there no longer turn to Europe as the default when it comes to cuisine, rather looking to their own rich heritages passed on for generations. From the northern borders of Mexico to the tip of Chile, the region is teeming with flavors and ingredients that vary widely from one country to the next and that even locals are only beginning to discover and appreciate. Whether it is from oceans and lakes or some of the world’s tallest mountains, lush rain forests, or verdant countrysides, chefs all over the continent are rediscovering and elevating native ingredients and centuries-old culinary techniques in stylized contemporary restaurants.
Complementing the singularity of individual, chef-centric creativity, On Fire also explores the vital role of community—in professional kitchens, with customers, and among chefs, traditional cooks, and cultural experts—in sustaining passion and supporting excellence. What is perhaps a distinct trademark of the food industry is the way kitchens function as communities, from brigade-style organization to the camaraderie created by spending most waken hours together. It’s not rare to hear celebrity chefs say that they are opening more restaurants to offer opportunities to “homegrown” talent, to give promising chefs de cuisine, sous chefs, and assistant managers platforms of their own. This theme of community will extend to the conference’s extensive tastings and World Marketplace, highlighting collaborative pairings between chefs as well as relationships of inspiration.

General sessions, seminars, and workshops will explore what drives chefs and how they use their cooking talent to bring their cultures to life on the plate. The purposes behind their approaches are often equally gastronomic, exploratory, and educational: Through the mere act of eating, guests can learn more about their own or others’ culture. Innovative dishes will feature ingredients perhaps never before seen in the U.S., with the aim to inspire attendees to look for their own roots and in their own backyards to explore their cultures and what they have to offer, to inspire them to come up with new culinary strategies and develop their own voices.

Please join us April 20-22, 2016 for our next Worlds of Flavor Conference, as we take a deep dive into the design and evolution of modern culinary vision and strategy, signaling concepts to watch in Europe, Latin America, and the United States that reframe the story of old and new.
2016 WORLDS OF FLAVOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE & FESTIVAL

The Culinary Institute of America’s Worlds of Flavor® International Conference & Festival is widely acknowledged as our country’s most influential professional forum on world cuisines, food cultures, and flavor trends.

Each year, the Worlds of Flavor conference welcomes more than 60 guest chefs and other expert presenters from around the world and across the United States to the college’s historic Napa Valley campus to explore the best of world cuisines that are reshaping palates and our industry. Now in its 18th year, this annual gathering of professionals has become a “must attend” for leading chefs, corporate menu decision-makers, foodservice management executives, suppliers, and media.

ATTENDANCE AND REGISTRATION

Total attendance for the Worlds of Flavor conference is limited to 700 senior-level chefs, independent and chain restaurant operators, university and contract foodservice managers, hotel food & beverage directors, leading foodservice manufacturers and marketing experts, wine and other beverage producers and distributors, supermarket foodservice operators, educators, world cuisine experts, and other influential foodservice industry professionals from the United States and around the world.

As part of the audience, the conference has traditionally included 50 consumer and foodservice trade media representatives. Recently, journalists attending and/or covering the Worlds of Flavor Conferences have represented publications ranging from Nation’s Restaurant News, Plate, and Flavor & The Menu to the New York Times, USA Today, San Francisco Chronicle, Houston Chronicle, Saveur, Time, Eater, and Food Republic—together with international media from Europe to Australia.

The Worlds of Flavor Conference typically sells out months in advance, so be sure to secure your participation early so as not to miss out on this incredible flavor odyssey. For program updates and registration, please visit worldsofflavor.com.
SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The Culinary Institute of America welcomes a wide range of organizations to participate in making this ambitious program a reality, including national and regional governmental agencies, trade associations and private companies, as well as association and corporate sponsors from the United States.

ABOUT THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

Founded in 1946, The Culinary Institute of America is an independent, not-for-profit college offering bachelor's and associate degrees in the culinary arts and baking and pastry arts. A network of more than 48,000 alumni in foodservice and hospitality has helped the CIA earn its reputation as the world's premier culinary college. Degree programs, certificate programs, and courses for foodservice professionals are variously offered at the college's main campus in Hyde Park, NY; at the CIA at Greystone in St. Helena, CA; at the CIA, San Antonio, TX; and CIA's newest campus in Singapore.

For many years, The Culinary Institute of America has been a widely recognized leader in making the best of world cuisines and flavors more accessible for foodservice professionals and the media. Educational programs highlighting world cuisines permeate the curriculum and special initiatives of all campuses of The Culinary Institute of America. The CIA's annual DVD and web series, Savoring the Best of World Flavors, has twice been honored with a James Beard Award for Best Webcast.

To learn more about The Culinary Institute of America and the programs and activities offered at its four campuses, please visit the college's two websites: ciachef.edu (for general information about the college, and especially its degree programs) and ciaprochef.com (for information about the college's programs for culinary and wine professionals, as well as access to its many online learning opportunities).

“The Worlds of Flavor conferences are truly the most epic and inspirational food experiences. Yes, they're educational, but for anyone who cares deeply about food and what it means to this world—they're emotional. I will always remember the first conference I attended, which was on Latin America. Rick Bayless called to the podium a man who had been flown up from the Yucatan to bury and roast a pig on the grounds of the CIA in order to make a traditional cochinita pibil. He had never been outside of his village, from what I understand, and when he walked up in front of all those people to accept our applause, he started to weep. And so did I, and I think everyone there.”

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