

Gastronomic voyage

Michelin-starred chef Stephane Gaborieau talks about his journey in the culinary world

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

The best food is one that is sourced locally and is in its pure organic form. A simple mantra for clean eating, but one that is often forgotten in the urban chaos of today's world. In 2004, chef Stephane Gaborieau won the title 'Best Chef of France' and was awarded his first Michelin star in 2008 for his restaurant Le Pergolese in Paris. For someone who advocates the cause of simple eating, Chef Stephane Gaborieau began his career at the Michelin-starred 'Dodin Bouffant' in Paris. He went on to become chef de partie at various prestigious restaurants with great names such as M. Menagier (Le Moulin du Maine Brun), George Paccard, Roger Pierre (Hotel du Palais), M. Villier (Restaurant La Palm d'Or, Hotel Martinez, Cannes), Francis Chaveau (L'Amandier) and the Majestic. He was recently at The Ritz-Carlton, Bengaluru, to celebrate French cuisine as part of a two-city tour of India. Known for his sophisticated Provençal style of cuisine, the chef talks about his passion for cooking and serving authentic dishes.

When did you get interested in cooking?

I was raised by my grandparents in the countryside; my grandfather was a butcher. They used to take me for long

walks in the woods and make me discover everything that surrounded us. They were simple and loved nature and local produce. Watching them cook is what made me want to become a cook.

How was your experience at Dodin Bouffant?

This experience was unbelievable for me. When you are done with your apprenticeship in a small town in France, it is very important for a cook to travel to the capital (Paris) to experience the restaurant business there. You get to see and meet the best chefs and work in renowned restaurants. They have a lot of money, lots of produce to choose from and many luxurious ingredients to work with. This was my first experience in a renowned kitchen and everything was new to me as I was coming from a small town in France.

What are some of the secrets of the Provençal style of French cuisine?

To produce a beautiful Provençal cuisine, you should be able to visualise the south of France with your eyes closed while tasting the dishes. Provençal cuisine requires lots of herbs and fresh vegetables. It is a humble style of cooking. Provence is a beautiful sunny region and that is what you should find on the plate.



Chef Stéphane Gaborieau



In 2004, you won the title ‘Best Chef of France’ (Meilleur Ouvrier de France). How did you feel?

It was a great honour as this meant recognition from the masters of culinary—Paul Bocuse, Joel Robuchon and Pierre Orsi, to name a few. There are about 100 chefs in France who have received this honour and about 60 are still cooking. The ‘Best Chef of France’ title means to convey your know-how in the simplest possible way—you are an envoy of France and French cuisine.

What is your opinion of organic and natural food?

We all agree that we have to learn how to eat differently. Each person should be aware that a small sustainable or green gesture could make a huge difference. This would also help us reduce waste. I believe we have to go back to eating seasonal and natural to make sure our planet survives. I personally select my ingredients from the market every day to ensure their origin. We as professionals of the food industry are very conscious about this and insist on presenting healthier food to our clients.

What does the Michelin star mean to you?

Whether you have a Michelin star or not, a chef has to always be generous. Surely, it is an achievement, but it isn't everything. You always have to remember to respect people, please your clientele and be honest in your way of cooking. You cannot hide behind subterfuges; you have to be authentic. I think that I have managed to maintain my Michelin star over the years because I always have the desire to please the clients that enter our restaurant Le Pergolese.

Food has now become a focal point with television shows and blogs. What do you think of this trend?

There should not be too much or too little—these shows should be balanced out. People tend to forget the chefs once the show gets over; viewers don't understand that it takes a lot of work to become a good chef. These shows can be very informative but people watching should be able to discern what is true and what is not. These shows promote our industry, but it is not all about appearances, is it?

What are your future plans?

Apart from Le Pergolese, we have opened a gastro-pub called ‘La Cuisiniere Lyonnaise’ and we are looking to open more all over France, as well as internationally. Fingers crossed. □