

Just back from Star Chefs in New York City

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Just returned home from NYC after attending the Star Chefs Congress and celebrating my 11th anniversary with my amazing wife, Ximena.

This is the third time I have gone to Star Chefs, which is a three-day event of demonstrations and speakers from the culinary world. The last two times had some great topics and I came away with a head full of ideas. Not food ideas, but ideas and thoughts about the restaurant industry as a whole and how we fit into it. You can check out last year's posts in the October 2008 Archive.

This year I brought along Trang, our pastry chef, and she got a lot out of the conference. She attended a bunch of classes and demonstrations and as it was her first time to NYC it was a good eye opener for her. I often say to our chefs when they go and do a stage that sometimes it's not what you actually learn from the culinary side that's important, sometimes it's the reminder that we actually do a great job and should compare ourselves to some of the better restaurants that we read about. So if they come back with a renewed sense of pride and respect in where they work I feel it's money well spent to send them.

Trang will be posting a blog about her experience as soon as she catches up from being away for a week.

I personally did not get as much out of this year's event as in past years. There were a few good topics: Pierre Gagnaire, Daniel Boulud and Grant Achatz on stage together was probably the highlight, as well as a demo with Alex Stupak, the amazing pastry chef at WD50.

As a chef, I am always questioning myself and where I am getting my inspiration. I am not as inspired by dining in other restaurants as I used to be. I tend not to read as many cookbooks as I used to and listening to others speak about their food and inspiration is not as helpful as it once was. I hope this means that I am more comfortable in my style. I have always felt that as a chef it is important that you have your own voice, that your food could be picked out of a group of other chef's dishes - that the way you look at food, create a dish and use ingredients comes from a particular point of view that has been developed by all of your past experiences and by paying attention to those foods that truly speak to you as a person. This is filtered through the flavors you were exposed to as a child, your culinary training, reading, and the thinking that goes on in the mind of a chef, as well as your appreciation for life and how to enjoy it. I have found that if I like someone's food I will probably like the person.

While I was having dinner with my friend Kate Krader, an editor at Food & Wine magazine, she was telling me about her breakfast meeting with Pierre Gagnaire, arguably one of the most creative chefs working today. She said that he did not want to talk about food or his past and that he was much more comfortable talking about art and the overall creative process. He also does not dine in other restaurants often and Kate was surprised to hear he had eaten in a rather mediocre restaurant the night before. When he was on stage he congratulated Grant Achatz for the respect he has built from chefs in France although he himself had never dined at Alinea. His inspiration obviously comes from who he is as a person and not from any exposure to his chosen profession.

We had some very nice meals while we were in NYC. Locanda Verde for great Italian food and really great desserts, a nice meal at Eleven Madison (although it seemed they are struggling a bit with their recent four star review), a nice but not very polished meal at Aldea, a really good anniversary lunch at Gramercy Tavern and a good simple Italian meal at Peasant. And of course, a great lunch with my friend Jonathan Waxman at Barbutto - I can't go to NYC without having lunch there. Jonathan is a chef that is very comfortable in his shoes, although they are very often sandals.

Posted by Trey Foshee on 2009-09-27 in [NYC](#), [New York](#), [Star chefs](#), [Trang](#), [Trey](#)

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