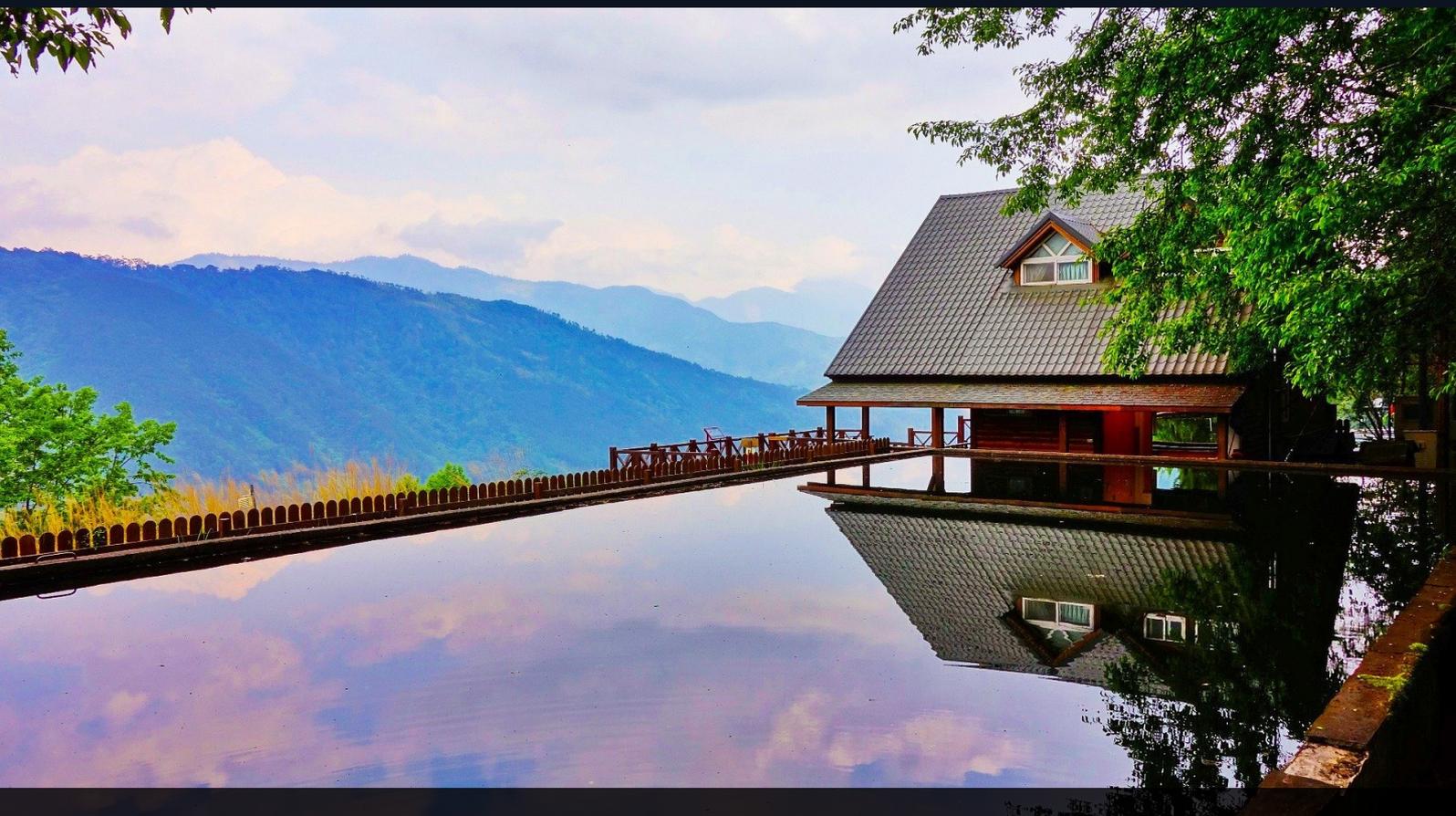


THE HOTELIER'S HUB

Bi-weekly newsletter



Andrea Camastra
Michelin Star Chef

MICHELIN STAR FOOD IS A GOOD FOOD ELEVATED TO AN EXPERIENCE LEVEL

Interview by Dawid Thom

Andrea Camastra was born in Puglia, Italy to a French-Italian family and brought up in the culinary tradition of Italian cuisine. His love and respect for natural products comes from his hometown of Bari - a place where fresh seafood is eaten raw.

Andrea gathered his experience in the some of the best international restaurants where he was awarded the titles of Chef of The Year North England, Chef of the Future 2015 and Chef of the Year 2017 by Gault&Millau Guide. He also won a Michelin star whilst working at SENSES.

Andrea Camastra is the master of international culinary language and an ambassador of “Note-by-Note” cooking techniques. Since 2015 Andrea has been a member of “Oxford Encyclopedia” for the highest achievement of lifetime and is now a Magistrate of Oxford University.



You said: “Every chef has to start somewhere. Like a child learning to walk before its runs” – so how did your journey, as a Chef, started?

My journey was a little bit different than anybody's else. I was not meant to be a chef - even if half of my family is working in the gastronomy, another half are university teachers, layers, doctors, or bank managers. My father wanted me to become a doctor and musician. I have managed to become a musician, but not a doctor. Unfortunately, my father died when I was 8. He was a bank manager, only 42 years old. At that time, it was a bit confusing. My mom was left with 4 kids. I must admit, it was difficult to go through some things.

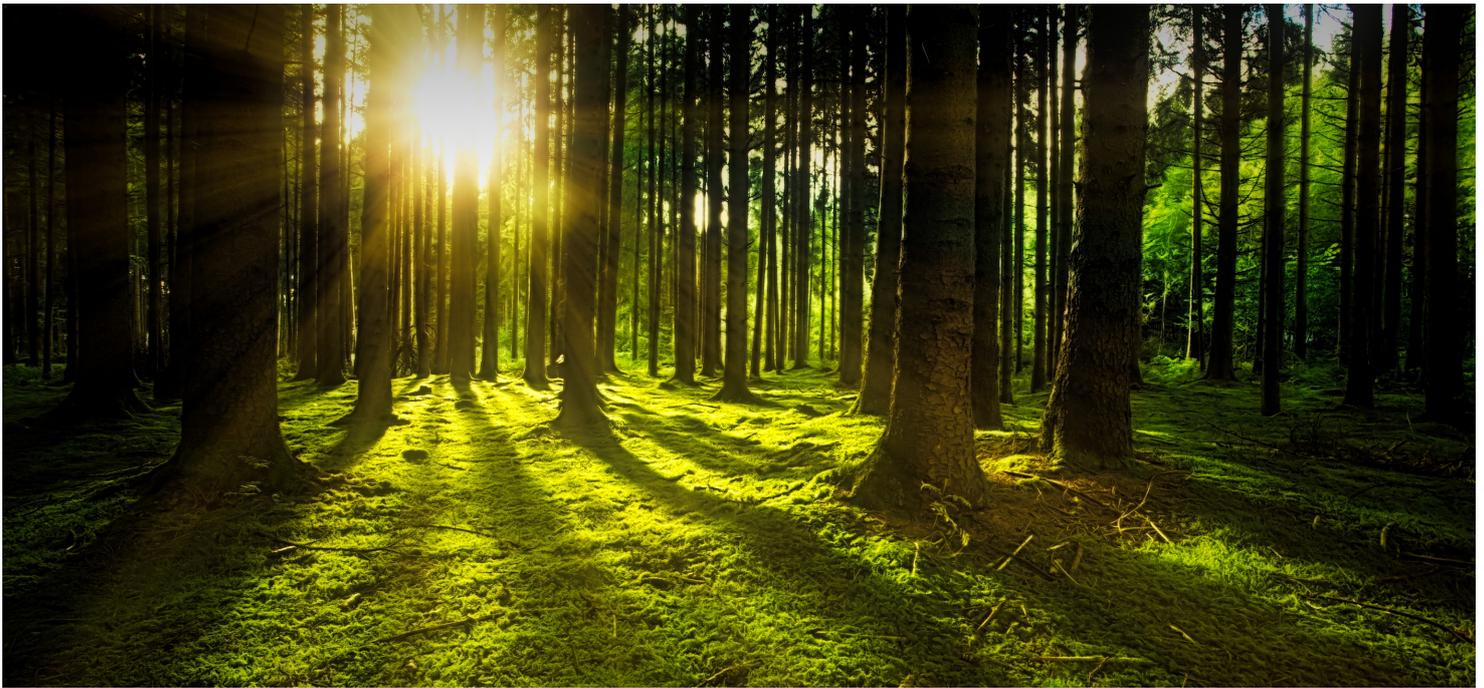
I was born at truly foodie house. At the age of 10, I have decided to enter the restaurant's world. My mom and my dad were good cooks, and my family knew the gastronomy business already, therefore I've started to be in it more and more. As it can be imagined, I have started like everybody else - I was washing dishes. I remember it was a small restaurant around 200 metres away from my house. During the service time I was cleaning and during the preparation time I was doing little things like picking up basil to make a pesto – dirty jobs like every other youngster. Then time by time, year by year, in summer seasons when I was out of school, I've started doing more and more in the kitchen. Sometimes I was

was on the floor working as a waiter. I have worked where I was needed. There was a bit of “black market” in the restaurant business at that time. Not many of staff had contracts, there was no age or hours limit. That small restaurant was my first job and the passion to work has been with me ever since. I was 18 years old when I finished school and left my country, Italy and never came back.

You have been living in Poland for many years now. Why did you decide to stay here permanently and open your restaurant in Poland?

I have graduated from Oxford University with master's degree and I have worked in every country in Europe, so I have seen a lot of European styles of living. When I came to Warsaw, I liked it straight away. I like the way of living here. It is a big city, but also a small city in a sense. It is very easy to access everything. Warsaw is not like any other metropolis, because it is much less chaotic. In other cities you have a big city centre and nothing else around or, if you go outside of the centre it is dangerous and dirty. Warsaw have many different parts where you can spend time. It is not only the Old City and New Town. There are lots of locations where you can go and a lot of green, which is fantastic. I come from a south of Italy, I live in front of the sea, so for me forest is attractive. People from the

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seaside see the forest and snow only in television. I really like Poland. I feel safe in here. It is clean and tidy. People are incredibly decent compared to some other places. I live in Poland for only 8 years, however any time I go somewhere and come back I feel like coming back home. I saw the gastronomy level in here and I've thought that it would be good to open a restaurant in here and it worked out very well. We have managed to get a Michelin Star, Gault & Millau, the World's 50 Best Restaurants and the 100 Best Chefs in the world. We won in every category in Gault & Millau – Chef of the year, Chef of the future. We have also received 18,5 points and 4 hats. Big boom quickly, but I knew what I was doing straight away. I had already in mind the kind of style I wanted to impose in my restaurant from years before. To have this more scientific approach of understanding. People associate me with molecular gastronomy, which is not really the truth. It is much deeper. More complicated. I am not running a restaurant, which sales only foams and sweets. In our restaurant we use laboratory of chemistry to study things, so we can cook them better. To give contribution on better execution of anything. We just analyse things, then we cook them as we would as convention food, but it is very precisely analysed before and after cook. I had this style in mind and, likely, it was unique here. I became an ambassador of Note-by-Note, which is the next trend after the molecular gastronomy. The handbook of molecular gastronomy of Note-by-Note is coming out in April, written by Mr. Herve This and I am ambassador and one of the authors of the book as well. This is unique achievement, because only Ferran Adria did this before me, therefore it is something I am very proud of.

I came here with a Michelin Star level already, however everything happened to me here. This place means a lot to me. Even if I would be elsewhere and might have the opportunity to work for 3-Michelin Stars, I have the most beautiful memories of my personal career from here. I was always working and taking Michelin Stars

for other chefs in other countries, and now it is on my own name. I have a lot of positive memories in here, so I think I own something to Poland. Thanks to my fiancée Anna I have decided to stay here and open a restaurant in February 2021. I will open it in Warsaw – I am not going anywhere.

You are known to be Polish cuisine lover – is there any dish that has surprised you?

Not only one, to be honest. I love Polish cuisine, however it would be too predictable for me to open a Polish style Michelin Star restaurant. So, I have decided to take a challenge with a cuisine that I started to discover and like.

Like with everything else in life, when you do not know something you study and try to gain some information. It ended up with me reading books from XIV, XV, XVI century about what was happening here in the sense of gastronomy. I was the only chef in Poland, who asked for this kind of books in the Wilanów Palace. It is normal when you are a foreigner – you should be the last person who asks for that kind of books. But, like in every other country, when you think you belong to the place you do not get the information because you think that you know everything. As the matter of fact – you do not. I am Italian and I do not know everything about Italian cuisine. I will be lying to you, if I say I do. I should know everything - but I do not. So, I've started to study about Polish cuisine and basically in those centuries there were 2 cuisines leading the gastronomy world in Europe – that was French and Polish. Very few people know that. In fact, you can see a lot of similarities in those two cuisines. So effectively, by being half and a bit of French heritage, it was not difficult for me to reproduce a very modern fusion of Polish/French cuisine.

I love “Żurek” – it become one of my favourite soups. I also like “Ogórkowa”. I have a huge experience in baking – thanks to my uncle who is four-time world champion. I worked with him for many years, so I particularly like baking. I also like Polish way of celebrating things - with



central tables, with hams and pates and bread that you have in weddings and Christmas. I have felt in love with a Polish cuisine almost instantly. And, very often, I may say to my fiancé “you know what? I fancy to go to Karczma today”. I say that at least once a week. I really like to go to those restaurants, sit down and eat the Polish food. Sadly, it is very rare to find an original Karczma. They do not think it is necessary to do extraordinary food in Karczma. One of my dreams, which I will most definitely do in the future, is to open a good Karczma. Maybe with some scientific methods, which people do not have to see. People in here always open Italian restaurants or Japanese sushi – but it would be very nice, if someone would be more focused on opening Karczma. “Okay, lets open a Polish restaurant with the highest quality. Let's not buy the low-quality meat – let us find the best, local one. Let us make original Karczma”. It is a shame that they don't do it because I am a huge fan of Karczmas. Luckily, when I go to my fiancé parents (and I am talking about those old fashion, “real deal” mountain people) it is a feast every day. My future mother-in-law cooks the original food, and it is always pleasing, so I am a big fan.

Your restaurant – Senses – is one of three restaurants in Poland that received Michelin Star. Is our country ready for Michelin Star restaurants? Do Polish chefs still have a lot to learn?

We all have a lot to learn and there is no such a thing as being ready for Michelin Star level restaurant. Michelin Star level restaurant should not only mean sophisticated food, but also nicely, technically executed food. Moreover, we should always have at the back of our head the definition of restaurant – the place where you go to eat food. So, it must be deliciously cooked, nice food. Whether you have a Michelin level or not. I think you will always be ready. Like any other country in the world. It is up to us - chefs - to expose it and propose it. By understanding

the culture around us. You cannot do the same fine dining near, like you do in the extreme restaurants in Spain, Italy, France, or America. This extremism of going over the bad line, which almost become an artistic form, but without so much substance. It is something that needs to be understood from a different point of view. Obviously, we cannot impose that in here, but we should not impose this everywhere. Michelin Star food is a good food elevated to an experience level. I do not think there is such a thing as “if Poland is ready”, because everyone is ready. It is our job to make sure that we propose it and expose it into the correct way. That is the thing that we should take into consideration. Of course, you are ready. Why should you not be ready to sit down in a classic Michelin Star restaurant? I do not know. Now, the gastronomy world already forgot about the luxury and the French 3 Michelin Star style with gold everywhere and 50 people waiting around you. This is gone, even though it was very attractive to see. Thanks to France we have this knowledge today. The new law, especially after COVID, is going for casual dining. Of course, with class, style, and high-quality ingredients. The customers those days want to be left alone and feel comfortable. There will be a theatre, but in more casual way.

How did you feel when you received the Michelin Star for the first time?

Happy. I worked 21 years in multiple Michelin Star restaurants worldwide, however that's still huge achievement. I was happy, but more excited for all my staff - my co-workers. I never say that they work for me, but with me. I was very happy for them. For me it was just a beginning of much greater things to happen. Most of my staff never even worked in such an environment and getting a Michelin Star for them was like “wow!”. I must say that it is being taken in the wrong way by lots of the people. There is something to change in a mentality here. In my opinion, all restaurant workers must learn a bit of humbleness. To be a bit more humble. There is a thing of getting arrogant and having nose up. Some people get an



excuse after receiving Michelin Star and say “I will go to work somewhere else, I feel like Jesus and I will earn 10-times more”. Sadly, they realize that they, by themselves, were worth slightly less than they expected. I am very humble chef, even if I am the highest in the ranking. I think that our job is to get successful first and then give that to the next generation, obvious the local one, so they can take that with the right stage of mind and philosophy.

In 2019 you have been named one of the 100 Best Chefs in the world, according to „Le Chef” magazine. Has anything changed in your professional and personal life since then?

Absolutely not. Like I’ve said, I was extremely happy, same as with the Michelin Star. They were both a big thing. I was satisfied and extremely happy because of one reason - it confirmed me that what I was doing was unique. What I do is unique worldwide. There is nothing alike, but it does not mean there isn’t anything better. When you do such a thing, you are taking a risk. You believe it is the right thing to do, but you are only one from 7,5 billion people, so there is a little margin in there. A drop in the ocean. Therefore, you are taking a risk. I was right then, I had a feeling by studying and looking, experiencing what other people were doing. I was working and eating at places, observing how other chefs vision

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their own creations. I was happy that I made the right decision to go that way. In other words, I did not waste 20- or 30-years’ time by believing in something that was only in my head.

To be honest, and everybody know that, I do not watch rankings. I am more interested to cook well than to watch the rankings. On the day of the ranking’s announcement, there was the Gault & Millau gala in the north of Poland. I was in the hotel getting ready with my fiancé and I’ve received million messages with congratulations from around the world. Tens of hundreds of messages with congratulations: “bravo, congrats”. And I said “listen! It is not my birthday today. The Gault & Millau should be in 4-5 hours, I am not sure what is going to happen. Congratulation for what?” and then they send me this list. I did not check it before. They texted me that I was on it and they are congratulating me. So that is how careless I am about thing like that. I did not know about it. I said to my fiancé that I am on the 100 Best Chefs in the world, so we had a little toast, and this is it.

Where do you get the inspiration for new dishes from?

I believe the most important factors are creativity and artistry. It should come randomly. I am a person who gets inspired from emotions, from people.



It is very hard to answer this question because I am very emotional person. I am extremely sensible, sometimes even too much. Very often, when I sat down and worked out the menus with all the books open in front of me – it was pointless. This is what I discovered many years ago. It is not creativity. You are forcing yourself to do something, to come up with something that you would consider putting into the menu and it never worked because it was not spontaneous. I might have a new idea now, while we are chatting. I might have an idea while entering McDonald's. Something can come up any time. Details can show up quickly and something might look familiar and then a good idea comes, and it happens. There are no rules for that. Certainly, I get inspired from the country. I like forest, but it does not mean that I would find some extremely huge potential there at that time, it is just the feeling of being relax. Maybe the inspiration will come later. It is hard to predict. You know what, even being half-forced to do something can be meaningless too. Job is done, however, I would not feel satisfied. On top of that, if for three months nothing is coming up – maybe it is not the right moment. It shows that I am not mentally ready to do such a thing or maybe during the following months I would have too many ideas – who knows. I had a time in my life, when I had 2-3 ideas daily.

The more I work manually, the more ideas I have. I am the opposite to guys working in silence, with hundreds of books. I prefer to peel vegetables, work with proteins. This is the way I am focused on daily basis. That is the best time for me when the ideas come out.

You have managed to build an amazing team in your restaurants. Do you have any advice on how to keep young people motivated? How should the relationship between the chef and the student look like?

I am happy to say that I have built many teams in the kitchen, not only one. Suggestion for young people is, as I was saying before – be extremely humble, work hard and be loyal to your chef. In Poland, it happens quite often that the young people tend to work in one place only for few months - in “my times” it was years. It should not be like that. It should be years of development. That is the global trend. We have the same problem here, in Spain, Brazil, or Australia. There are too many rights now. You cannot spend more than 12 hours per day in a kitchen, even if in my times we all did it. We had extreme eager to learning and being successful. We were driven by emotions and strong passion. We did not have to count the hours. We just wanted to learn. Now, it is totally different. If you compare what we did back then, and what it is like working

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in the kitchen now – they have holidays now! We were lucky to get one day off. Now you get two days off and when you start to go over 10, 11 hours at work people start to moan and complain. If you are not putting an effort in what you are doing, you are not going to be successful.

My suggestion for the young generation is: keep humble, work hard, no arrogance, have the desire and passion, have that thing in mind that it does not matter what it is, but you want to go through it. Learn, start from the classics, basics. Do not go too far. It is consequence – you must learn how to walk before you start to run. Try to learn the “real-deal” first. Once you understand that then you can move step forward to understand what you are doing mechanically.

There are three stages in the kitchen that are extremely important. The first is the key and the one that people rarely go through. The first stage is WHAT – it means that you learn what to do. The second is HOW – you learn how to do it. For the many people this is enough. Those are technical things. When you master those two – you are technically powerful. The third question is WHY - you reach this point when you start to be more philosophical. First you do you mechanics, then you must ask yourself why you are doing what you are doing so you are understanding that. The

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secret of doing the job is to keep humble, because if you are humble you will work much better and you will see the results later. Basic skills are a toll for expression. I came from a musician family and I am musician myself. You cannot express yourself while playing an instrument if you do not know basics. Simple as that. That's why it is very important to go through the stages of HOW and WHAT. That is the basic information about your technical skills, which later give you the chance of expression. There are many chefs, who have a lot of skills. Lots of them have the same skills, however the more successful will be the ones who understood and learn how and why use their skills.

You have been cooking since you were 10 years old. Nowadays, a lot of youngsters enjoy and are passionate about cooking, but do not transform their passion into a profession. How do you recognize a young, talented chef?

Young, talented chef is a guy, who is not going to stop in front to anything. A guy, who in the kitchen, is listening and asking you questions. He will question everything. And he is there no matter how long it takes to arrive to certain point. A guy who is asking questions is a guy, who has interest. When you have interest into something you are going to get deep into it. Which in other words means



working for it. So, talented young person is a person, who knows how to listen more than how to talk. And is willing to stick to somebody and learn as much, as possible. I am a target person. When I have a target, I would walk through dead bodies to have that. I do not care, if I am wrong or I am right. If I have a target, I will do everything possible to arrive to that thing. No matter what it takes. Guys, who are passionate and talented are people that will achieve their goals no matter what.

What do you look for while recruiting a new staff member for your restaurant?

A nice person to work with. I never watch CVs. I do not care whether they worked before. At some point, I do not even care what their technical skills are because I will give it to them. But if it is a nice person to work with, for me - it is a winner. They need to be pleasant, smiling, sunny. I hate miserable people in the picture. You come across a lot of miserable people in gastronomy world today, I must say. When you have passion, you come excited every morning, you come with a certain spirit. Because, as I said, I am very emotional and extremely sensible, for me to have a very clean and peaceful and positive, smiling environment is the most important thing in the kitchen. So, what I am looking for is just a nice person with whom, at the end of the service, you can have a glass of wine. Everything is emotional, whether we want to it or not. The world function emotionally for me. We do not really see that on some occasions. But the whole world function emotionally. If we shoot somebody it is emotion. If you love somebody it is emotion. If you steel from somebody it is emotion. So, the world function emotionally. For me it is extremely important that the person with who I must work comes in the morning and you feel this positivity and smile from them. I am okay to come home destroyed physically but happy. I am okay to wake up tired in the morning but happy. You will feel it less, because you

do not do it for the rest of your life. Yes, it is hard to work in the kitchen. It is very hard, but you do it for the short period of time. People, who are working in it for a very long time and who are working very hard – those are limited people. Somebody does not want to go until the certain point, or it is hard to do it this way. Okay. But some people have extreme passion and want to spend 20-hours a day in a kitchen. Later on, you are going to become a Head Chef and start to work more mentally than physically, but still it is a must to direct others how to do things.

I am only looking for nice, loyal, smiling and positive people. It is very easy to teach somebody how to work. If you know how and it is a positive person, it is easy. It is very difficult to teach somebody how to behave. So, I do not care very much about CV. I had people with CV, which should show some extraordinary skills. Then you see them in real life, and they are not very good, which in fact shows you the level of passion. I have seen people with tattoos of knives, forks and chickens and it is everywhere. And you ask them to do one job for one week every day and they are... annoyed. So, those people do not really know themselves. If you are covering yourself with a food tattoo and after one week of doing one thing you are bored - then you do not have passion. Passion is when you do the same thing every day for 25-30 years and you are never bored. Then you have passion.

Usually, you have been working 16-18 hours a day. Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus your restaurant has been closed. How the pandemic influenced your professional and personal life? Do you have more time for yourself and your family or you use this time to work on a new menu?

As bad as this sounds, during this pandemic I've learn much more about myself. I thought I have known everything. I have learned many things about myself about which I did not even have physical and mental time



to think, while having such a lifestyle. In my case – it does not only mean running the restaurant. It means running my restaurant, running laboratory, running the public relations, media, the journalists, the inspections and many more. You have so much on your head daily that you rarely stop to think about yourself. I have learned that I can give much more to the community in sense of what I do. It will be good to myself to slow down a little bit. It taught me that I do not have to do 10 things like before, now I can do 2. I am not going to say that I will do them better than before – I just have to change the priority. I would like to be more calm, more calculated. This time showed me something. I have learned to take care of priorities. Before, I had to work twice as hard to be spotted quickly. We are living in a place, where the stars are not known well yet by all the population. It was twice harder than in other places in the world. Any other place – your chance can come quicker. It was though in Warsaw. I had to do miracles to get spotted. In the end that was the right thing to do. If not, I would not be sitting here with you today. Now, I am thinking slightly different. I became a better person. I understand, which philosophy to follow. It is close to Japanese philosophy. I keen on being extremely peaceful and focused. Do few things - but masterpieces. Before,

I was trying to do 100 masterpieces, all of them used to be unique, now it is enough to do 10. They will be masterpieces anyway, but they will give me the freedom to be more peaceful mentally. When you are more peaceful mentally, you can produce much more.

Leaving my restaurant was not a bad thing. We were very different people with my former partners. I wish them all the best, but we had very different views and, in the end, we were two very contrasting human being. Decision has been made - I will open my own restaurant.

Now the times have come that, due to coronavirus, I am not in the kitchen. It is just too much. I am not used to it. I really love to be in the kitchen and that is something that I terribly miss. I do not miss gala, fame and the popularity. I do not. I miss the fact of being in the kitchen and working with good products with other people, coming with creations. This is what I miss the most. Covid emphasises casuality. The way of being casual in a restaurant. You should feel relaxed, like a family member and not intimidated. Generally, you could see it in a lot of restaurants. Mine as well. You could go to there and see golden sparks everywhere with army of people wearing bow ties. It is almost intimidating for some. I will re-open restaurant on the highest level, like I

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had the other one, but with a different mentality. I do not want to open a restaurant for small category of people. I do not want to open the best restaurant in here. I want to open restaurant that is accessible to everybody. If you are asking about high level – the answer is yes. Michelin Star – yes. But affordable to everybody and open to everybody. I do not want the best place in this country – I want a place for everybody. I would keep the extremely high standards, because I do not want to work below my technical abilities. It is truly important. My job is to create such an environment so people could feel comfortable at my place. After Covid, these things are being emphasized. It almost came like the trend and I like that. It will be a place where you will come with 100 PLN and could get couple dishes. However, if you will ask for the full journey into the theatre settings, we will give you those experience, but the guests will be free to decide what would be best for them.

Is there anyone who inspires you as a chef?

No. I have respect for a lot of chefs in the world. Many of them are genius. I have some soft spots for people. Eg. Marco Pierre White for his extreme honesty. He is a real chef. Obviously, I have a serious position for what Ferran Adria did through Herve This. Mr. This is one of a people, who inspires me as a mentor, as a person and as professional. Mr. Herve This is an inventor of molecular gastronomy and Note-by-Note so he is the “God” of the modern cuisine for the past 40 years. He is an amazing inspiration because he invented molecular gastronomy in 1984 - it was a long time ago.

I have the appreciation for all the chefs. I have respect for all of them, but I did not get inspired from any of them. Obviously, Pierre Gagnaire is a big man. He is one of my closest friends, and he has a close relation with Mr. Herve This. There are more like my grandfathers. Those people are very generous, and they

are both hard workers. I might underline Heston Blumenthal as well. He gave, for sure, the new face of gastronomy. I am the ambassador of Note-by-Note, which is the last stand of molecular gastronomy, you cannot go more modern than that. There are also few chefs in Poland that I respect. There is, of course, Modest Amaro, who is doing an extraordinary job. Przemek Klima – who got his own Michelin Star and worked for me in the past as well. I also want to mention Dariusz Baranski who is a very talented chef, Marcin Przybysz, Beñat Alonso, or Jacek Grochowina. They are all doing extremely good job nowadays, but there are many more who aspire to be on the top, which is a key!

I have never followed any models in my life. I went for my own way. My way is unique. It is not a better one. I cannot say that. It could even be worst, but I have my own style and my own vision. I want to follow what I think is correct. Creative means “not to copy”. If you copy you are not creative. I took the risk on what I was doing, but apparently it paid off. So, at the end, I was not wrong.

What advice would you give to young cooks who start their careers?

Do not think about what you are going to do. Just do what you are asked for. Remember, as I said before guys - be loyal, work hard. Set yourself a target and understand which way you want to go and which level you want to achieve. Achieve it according to your daily life status. Be and work for a place which is worth to work at and learn, learn, and learn!

I’ve learned one thing in the kitchen - people have different qualities and there are some things that you cannot learn or some things that you will never arrived to because you are not set for those things. And it is not end of the world. I am not set for many things. You do not have to put the limitations on yourself, but you must know your limits in the meantime. Remember again – learn but not for a gloria achievement. Just think about it