

{Q&A}



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In pursuit of **EXCELLENCE**

The chef of *Hell’s Kitchen* puts out some heavenly cuisine at his Michelin-starred restaurants

Credit: Frederic Aranda

Gordon Ramsay may be best known in the United States as the star of *Hell's Kitchen*, but the star of six TV shows has also written six cookbooks and an autobiography, owns 10 restaurants and works as a consultant. In November 2006 he opened his first U.S. restaurant in New York City, Gordon Ramsay at The London.

After a brief professional soccer career in his native United Kingdom, Ramsay completed a college course in hotel management. At age 31 he opened his first restaurant, which was named after himself. A year later he opened Pétrus, which won a Michelin star within seven months. Since then he's racked up numerous awards and accolades, including Top Restaurant in the UK from the Zagat Survey, Best Fine Dining Restaurant from Harden's Guide and a veritable constellation of Michelin stars.

WINE REPORT recently talked with Ramsay about his accomplishments and goals.

WINE REPORT: What appeals to you most about a culinary career?

GR: The restaurant business is fast-paced and unpredictable. I thrive on competition and I am at my best under pressure, so to be working in the culinary industry is as satisfying as it is challenging.

WR: How would you describe your philosophy as a chef?

GR: I love fresh food cooked simply. When it comes to my restaurants, the customer is at the center of everything we do. The moment you lose sight of what it is to be on the receiving end, you are in trouble. This and the desire to create something totally different and exciting is always at the forefront of everything.

WR: Who are your inspirations and influences?

GR: Alain Ducasse is a huge inspiration. No other chef has been able to hold on to three three-star restaurants in different countries while simultaneously expanding his empire.

WR: One of your cookbooks is titled *Gordon Ramsay Makes It Easy*. What tips do you have for making food-and-wine pairing easy?

GR: I like simple dishes paired with clean, crisp wines that bring out the natural flavors of the ingredients on the plate. A rich Chardonnay, such as Cloudy Bay, is lovely with a simple fish supper or on a summer evening at home. A good glass of red wine, like a Cabernet Sauvignon, always pairs best with a grilled steak or lamb.

When entertaining, canapés with Champagne cocktails are an easy and elegant option. My drink of choice is a chilled glass of Dom Perignon – it goes well with everything!

WR: In November 2006 you opened your first restaurant in the United States, Gordon Ramsay at the London. Tell us about it.

GR: I am thrilled to be in New York among the best chefs in the world. Gordon Ramsay at The London isn't just one restaurant; it's taking two of my most successful concepts — my first and last London restaurants — and combining them into a fantastic food-and-beverage offering. There is a more formal and intimate dining room that's modeled after Restaurant Gordon Ramsay in London, with a la carte dishes and a seven-course prix-fixe menu. The casual dining option, The London Bar, is modeled after my latest London restaurant, MAZE, and serves small plates, traditional English tea service and excellent cocktails.

WR: Our editor in chief is a vegetarian. Would he be able to find something to eat on the menus at any of your restaurants?

GR: Absolutely. For the New York restaurant, we've created a fantastic seven-course vegetarian menu. I always try to prepare dishes that satisfy all tastes, whether you're a vegetarian or if you fancy a nice steak every once in a while.

WR: What measures do you take to ensure the quality of the ingredients that you serve? How about the quality of the wines on your wine lists?

GR: I'm truly passionate about offering quality food made with the freshest vegetables, fish and meat. I especially enjoy visiting farmer's markets early in the morning when the stalls are just opening, to get the best of the bunch. Having a top-notch dining experience often comes down to the quality of ingredients from the best purveyors. I am very lucky to have reliable suppliers, some of which have been working with us since the very beginning. And in the U.S., the meats and produce are extraordinary: beautiful wild mushrooms and truffles, Colorado lamb, fresh lobster from Maine, all top-notch.

In the restaurants, we try to create wine lists that represent a range of tastes from around the world, from all different price ranges. In the New York restaurant alone, we have 5,000 bottles and a range of wines by the glass, and the list continues to grow as we travel and taste new and different things.

WR: It's been said that your *Hell's Kitchen* TV series is mostly about humiliation. How do you respond to that? Do you believe that humiliation is an essential element of the professional kitchen experience, or is this just a way to draw an audience?

GR: I work very closely with my staff and expect the best from them and from myself as well. With the high pressure of the kitchen, I keep them on their toes. I don't want my staff to get too comfortable in the kitchen and lose their professionalism and edge.

WR: What is the turnover rate among your employees?

GR: I have an incredible core team that has been with me since the very beginning. Josh Emett, my chef at Gordon Ramsay at The London, has been an invaluable member of the team, as has Jean-Baptiste Requier. Mark Sargeant has been with me since the Aubergine days, and he now runs the show at Claridge's. And Angela Hartnett — she is absolutely incredible. She was my chef at The Connaught, and she just opened her own restaurant, Cielo at the Boca Raton Resort and Club in Florida. I take care to surround myself with the best of the best, and I know that they'll look after me just as much as I look after them.

WR: You've racked up a number of Michelin stars. What motivates your pursuit of Michelin stars?

GR: Michelin stars are the Oscars of the food world, so to be recognized by Michelin is an honor. But it's also important to keep my feet on the ground and to not get too hung up and lose sight of the here and now. I want only the best to come out of my kitchens, so in that sense, I am the first person to admit that I'm a perfectionist.

