



Q: What is the most important part of your practice as a chef?

A: Central to my culinary practice is the regular exploration of my inner self, creativity, and energy. Cooking every day is not only essential but also deeply ingrained in my approach. This daily engagement with food forms the foundation of my craft, emphasizing the importance of nurturing a healthy relationship with what I create. However, if I were to pinpoint my most cherished aspect of being a chef, it would undoubtedly be the joy I find in preparing meals for my loved ones. It's in these moments that I get to indulge in the art of crafting new recipes, fearlessly experimenting, and learning from any culinary mistakes along the way.

Q: How do you go about sustainably sourcing ingredients?

A: Coming from a farm-to-table background, I've always held sustainability as a core value in my culinary journey. This upbringing instilled in me the significance of hands-on involvement in the food production process. Building relationships with local farms is not only a means of expanding sourcing options but also fostering collaboration, a principle that aligns seamlessly with the values upheld at Simone's. In my pursuit of sustainability, I extend my sourcing efforts beyond the farms I know well. When I can't procure ingredients directly from farms or friends with gardens, I actively seek out alternatives at organic-focused grocery stores, local co-ops, and frequent farmers markets like the growers

market on Park and Central Ave on Saturdays and the farmers market at the railyards on Sundays. Ingredients aside, I also source all of my cookware, dinnerware, glassware, and silverware second-hand or from local small businesses. This holistic approach ensures that I maintain a commitment to sustainability in every aspect of my culinary practice.

Q: What is something you value about cooking meals at home?

A: This is an easy one. Preparing meals at home is a straightforward yet profound practice for me. It serves as a connection to my surroundings and provides a sense of grounding. Moreover, it allows me to infuse an intimate dimension into my culinary journey. One of my favorite at-home culinary adventures is a game I like to call 'What's in My Fridge?' In essence, it's my own version of the 'Chopped' challenge, where I take the ingredients on hand and turn them into a fantastic, unexpected meal.

Q: What is your process for curating a menu?

A: At Simone's, our culinary ethos revolves around embracing the seasons of mother nature, and this philosophy serves as the cornerstone of my menu curation process. To begin, I consider the current season. For instance, as fall approaches, I take note of the abundant harvest that includes a rich variety of ingredients like squash, fresh herbs, greens, and root vegetables. Once I've tuned into the season's offerings, I pivot to consider the specific event or occasion I'm curating the menu for. I seek out any themes or elements that harmonize with the event's essence, using them as creative touch points in crafting my menu. As I delve deeper into the creative process, I curate a complementary color palette that resonates with the season, the food, and the event theme. I then embark on an exploration of ingredient combinations, experimenting with various pairings, and imagining diverse plating options. It's in this creative journey that I find the elusive 'golden ratio' where every element aligns harmoniously, ultimately allowing the menu to naturally fall into place.

Q: In your opinion, what sets apart a memorable dining experience from an ordinary one?

A: I've noticed a recurring trend in many restaurant experiences, where at least one of the five essential elements of dining seems to be lacking. This observation has led me to reflect on the culinary landscape in our region, and I believe that part of the issue might be the limited number of individuals who truly value food enough to prioritize these crucial aspects. In my approach to dining, I emphasize the importance of the following five elements:

- 1. Curation: Curation is about carefully selecting and crafting a menu that not only features a range of flavors but also tells a story. It's an art that involves choosing ingredients intentionally, ensuring they harmonize, and creating a culinary journey for diners.
- 2. Atmosphere: The ambiance of a restaurant plays a pivotal role in enhancing the dining experience. The decor, lighting, music, and overall design should align with the cuisine and the emotions the chef intends to evoke.
- 3. Consideration of All Five Senses: Dining should be a multisensory experience. Beyond taste, it involves engaging all five senses - sight, smell, touch, and sound. The presentation of a dish, the aroma that wafts from the kitchen, the texture of each bite, and even the background soundscape all contribute to a memorable meal.
- 4. Passion: Passion is the driving force behind exceptional dining. Chefs and restaurant staff who are passionate about their craft are more likely to go the extra mile to create dishes that resonate with diners. This passion often translates into a commitment to quality, creativity, and continuous improvement.
- 5. Portions: Portion sizes matter. Overly large portions can overwhelm diners and detract from the overall experience, while undersized portions can leave them wanting more. Striking the right balance is essential to ensure satisfaction without waste. In my practice I aim to elevate the dining experience by incorporating these 5 elements, not only by offering delicious food but also by creating a holistic atmosphere where guests can savor every aspect of the culinary journey.