

Chemistry in the kitchen

The couple met cooking at cutting-edge Clio. Now they teach others their innovative techniques.

By Devra First Globe Staff / July 28, 2010

Q. You're in town from Pennsylvania to host a benefit dinner for the James Beard Foundation tomorrow with chef Tony Maws. Leading up to it, you've been giving workshops at his restaurant, Craigie on Main. You're teaching how to use the likes of hydrocolloids, liquid nitrogen, and transglutaminase. What do such ingredients bring to cooking?

Kamozawa Using hydrocolloids teaches cooks to work with more precision. It allows you to have a clear expression of ingredients.

Talbot A number of these things were once looked at in an industrial sense — how they could be used to extend shelf life. Now they're in the hands of skilled chefs and people passionate about ingredients. When we first started cooking, cooks would make butternut squash puree by adding fat. A lot of it. Now we've got so many farmers and foragers, and we're getting the best ingredients. You don't need to taste the butter. You can have an incredible squash puree and thicken it with xanthan gum. It reveals a nuance you didn't know about.

Q. What's the one ingredient you think everyone needs in the kitchen that they don't already have?

Talbot A scale. A digital scale.

Kamozawa That's not an ingredient, honey.

Talbot OK — if you're a sweet cook, xanthan gum for sauces. You can add structure and body to cakes, add moistness.

Kamozawa If you like to butcher meat and play with fish, I'd say transglutaminase. It's basically a protein bridge. They call it "meat glue" as slang. You can make sausages, or bacon-wrapped filet mignon without using string.

Q. What about people who are concerned about eating these sort of chemical-y ingredients?

Talbot If we were going to talk about all our ingredients under chemical names, sodium bicarbonate wouldn't make our muffins rise. Part of it is lack of knowledge. We didn't know what arugula was 10 years ago. Now everyone and their mother uses it.



Q. People can learn more about how you use them on your website, www.ideasinfood.com. And you've got a book coming out in December, "Ideas in Food: Great Recipes and Why They Work." But where can people find the ingredients?

Talbot Two good sources that we use are Terra Spice [www.terraspace.com] and Le Sanctuaire [www.le-sanctuaire.com].

Q. Take me through a dish from conception to realization.

Talbot The idea is popcorn gelato. We take popcorn and infuse milk with it, then we add that to caramelized white chocolate. We put it in a whipped cream canister and shoot that into liquid nitrogen. We serve it with a bit of smoked wild char roe, crispy lime leaf curd, and scallions. It looks like popcorn and tastes like popcorn, but it kind of throws you. It's pretty neat to break it down and rebuild it into the original again.

Q. What inspires you?

Kamozawa On a good day, we can find inspiration everywhere.

Interview was condensed and edited.