

Guru to the chefs

Ideas in Food co-author in San Antonio

By Edmund Tijerina, Staff Writer

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Alex Talbot may be one of the biggest names in food you've never heard of.

Together with his wife, Aki Kamoza, they operate Ideas in Food, a consulting business and blog by the same name.

Both accomplished chefs, they wrote a book that also bears that name, which occupies a place on many chefs' bookshelves and is a must for serious home cooks, even those who don't own immersion circulators or plan to work with transglutaminase.

In a straightforward style, the book explains much of the science behind cooking and presents recipes that highlight their insights and offers explanations of brining, dehydrating and even stove-top approaches to cooking sous vide. Their new book, "Maximum Flavor: Recipes That Will Change the Way You Cook," is coming out in October.

Talbot visited San Antonio to work with one of his clients, Tim Rattray of The Granary 'Cue & Brew, 602 Avenue A.

Talbot led an all-day workshop where some of the most skilled chefs in the city (and a food writer with very rusty professional cooking skills) cooked, talked and produced elements for a dinner at the restaurant.

After the workshop, Talbot took a few minutes to talk about creativity, his work and substances that form a gel with water, or hydrocolloids.

Q: How would you describe your work?

A: Our job is to make chefs better. Our job is to make cooks better. We work in our kitchen, people come to us, we go to restaurants, we work the texts, phones, smoke signals, however it is. We ask questions. We ask the hows and whys of what's possible and explore as many avenues as we can.

Q: Describe your creative process when it comes to food.

A: We ask what is possible. We look at what has been around historically. We look at what our experiences have been with food and then we weave them together. We're looking to figure out what is tastiest, what is most delicious for us, or for someone we're working with, and for their environment. Environment is so important to the end result. For instance, here at The Granary, barbecue is king. I don't think we're (going to serve) Sichuan scallops. It just doesn't make sense. In that same sense, we can have smoked and dried scallops and use that as a seasoning for something else, and it ties in quite

nicely. We look at what is the creative platform you're building upon and staying true to that.

Q: How can home cooks best use your ideas?

A: Realize (the book) is there as a resource. It's there to help them answer questions, whether they have successes or failures in the kitchen. From understanding seasoning in the section on salt to looking at no-knead bread, where we can take the hardship out of something like making brioche, where you have to try to emulsify all this butter into bread. We make it a no-knead process. Just mix everything together, and the next day you bake the guy and you're ready to roll.

Q: A lot of times, cooks get intimidated with words like hydrocolloids. What can you tell them to ease their apprehension?

A: Fifteen years ago, a lot of us didn't know what arugula was. I think part of it is about learning, if you're curious and want to know about your food and what's going on. Hydrocolloids have been around for years — centuries for that matter — from agar-agar in the Eastern (cuisines) to flour in Western cuisine.

Q: Where do you see the food world headed?

A: The food world is seeing more unique voices out there, small restaurants. I think that's wonderful. People who have become true to themselves (in the kitchen) allows for greater delicious experiences for diners.

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