

At the Chef's Table: Culinary Creativity in Elite Restaurants

By Vanina Leschziner



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This book is about the creative work of chefs at top restaurants in New York and San Francisco. Based on interviews with chefs and observation in restaurant kitchens, the book explores the question of how and why chefs make choices about the dishes they put on their menus. It answers this question by examining a whole range of areas, including chefs' careers, restaurant ratings and reviews, social networks, how chefs think about food and go about creating new dishes, and how status influences their work and careers. Chefs at top restaurants face competing pressures to deliver complex and creative dishes, and navigate market forces to run a profitable business in an industry with exceptionally high costs and low profit margins. Creating a distinctive and original culinary style allows them to stand out in the market, but making the familiar food that many customers want ensures that they can stay in business. Chefs must make choices between these competing pressures. In explaining how they do so, this book uses the case study of high cuisine to analyze, more generally, how people in creative occupations navigate a context that is rife with uncertainty, high pressures, and contradicting forces.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*At the Chef's Table* is the most sophisticated study of classification and action in a field of cultural production to date. I know of no other work that operates at this level of ambition and conceptual innovation. This book should be required reading for scholars in the sociology of culture, cognitive sociology, work and occupations, and organizational studies." (Omar Lizardo *University of Notre Dame*)

"Vanina Leschziner provides a rare and refreshing insight into the small and intense world of elite chefs. *At the Chef's Table* revivifies sociological questions of field and figure, cognition, replication, and innovation in the emerging debates about knowledge production and circulation." (Krishnendu Ray)

About the Author

Vanina Leschziner is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto.

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