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# Massimo Bottura

Chef and patron of Osteria Francescana Restaurant (Modena), 3 Michelin Stars

Special Guest at the Ceremony of the 16th Academic Year of ALMA  
Parma, Auditorium Paganini, 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2019

“*First* of all, I would like to thank ALMA’s management, all the students and all the chefs because you train students that are so good that... all those who come to do their internship at Francescana end up staying with us, and this is evidence of how well you educate pupils!

Two weeks ago, I was in New York to talk at the United Nations and around me there were heads of State, the most important people committed to social and environmental change. Being part of this dialogue made me think about the challenges we have to cope with every day, challenges that affect everybody: students, politicians, farmers and we chefs. It is truly a great honour for me to have the opportunity of sharing a message and using my voice to amplify the urgency for such change. This has been possible only after years of sacrifice, hard work, research and passion that have allowed me to understand that not only myself as a chef, but each one of us can undertake the responsibility of being part of a change and of sending out a strong and clear message. For me being proactive in this dialogue means much more than any award or prize because I can see a potential of evolution and growth in front of me.

I always say: in my future there will always be a future because I never stop dreaming. It is a potential that goes beyond me, that talks about us, about my team, about Osteria Francescana, Maria Luigia, Franceschetta, Food For Soul, Osteria Gucci, Torno Subito, and that sees us committed to looking for a goal, but with the desire to implement our small revolution... which has been able, however, to inspire the world. With this idea in my mind, I enter the kitchen every day, talk to my staff, invite them to undertake a path of cultural growth with the same enthusiasm and amazement of a child that discovers the world. I still remember when as a child



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- as Francesca mentioned before - I used to watch the world from under the table, whilst my grandma was preparing Tortellini; I used to stay there and, from there, everything looked different because I was under the table and saw the world from a different perspective (and meanwhile I would steal some Tortellini). So my passion for food probably comes from those very gestures, from that moment, from that amazement blended with curiosity. I think such amazement has never vanished. On the contrary, it has grown stronger. Still today at Francescana, we all look at the world from under the table, with our eyes wide open and full of amazement like those of a child.

Picasso used to say: “I could paint like Raphael when I was fourteen, but it took me a lifetime to learn how to paint like a child”. Culture is our engine, our reference landscape, it widens our horizons and opens up infinite possibilities. Our attention in the kitchen looks at how ideas take shape inspired by nature, helped by technology and motivated, now more than ever before, by social choices. This transformation is fundamental and tries to make visible and edible the invisible connections between art, technology and nature. Every thought, image, memory and passion are compressed in chewable bites because food is not only the quality of the ingredients, but also the quality of the ideas. In the middle of last century, would we have imagined the revolution of Charlie Parker or Thelonious Monk? No. Yet the music scene needed that revolution, that change of course and that freedom of expression.

We live in a country where the culinary tradition is as important as the wholehearted love of a mother. Colliding with all this is not recommendable. Yet, this is my first piece of advice to you: it is not an invitation to deny the past, but to celebrate it in the most authentic way possible, i.e. creating something new. That something new, although seeming drastically different, will always be the result of and homage to what preceded us. Because we know and must always be aware of who we are and where we come from, never forget it!

I love art, it is one of my reference points. There is a Chinese artist called Ai Weiwei: one of his works I am particularly fond of features the artist that is holding and dropping an ancient pot. Every day that image reminds me how I got to here: are the fragments an end or a new beginning? Breaking, transforming, recreating. Unlike what one could imagine, the artist does



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not deny the past, but tries to transform it literally breaking it, to then create the future starting from the past. This image is a metaphor of our creative process: our work is putting the pieces back together whilst re-discovering one's dreams and rearranging ideas. We should try to project into the future the best of our past filtered by critical and never nostalgic thinking. Today, I ask my team to be brave, to break the tie with one's own habits and revisit the creative potential of the humblest ingredients that are too often underestimated or wasted.

The true difference is not made by those who can surprise through technique. The difference lies in unveiling a different aspect and giving new dignity to something underestimated. An extraordinary sardine can convey more emotions than a cultured lobster. A rind of Parmigiano Reggiano can be more evocative than foie gras. At Casa Maria Luigia we grow our vegetable garden, fields, fruit trees, we dirty our hands with the raw materials, then enter the kitchen where we are inspired by them rewriting the rules with the suggestions from nature and its seasons. It is a very simple idea. Yet, it is also the most significant idea a chef can communicate today.

In order not to get lost in our daily routine, our secret is leaving a window open to poetry, a space that is always open to the unexpected because inspiration may arrive from anywhere, at any time and from anyone. A dish like Oops, I Dropped the Lemon Tart is poetry for me, a perfect reconstruction of the imperfect. When we talk about Oops, we talk of one of the world's most renowned dishes. But, we also talk of the ability of making mistakes and, grasping the flash of light in the darkness along the creativity process, tripping over the unexpected, you happen to see the world from a different perspective. It is not only a creative exercise. It is not only about telling a story. It is about giving a message, a belief, a revolution...which is not the one by Massimo Bottura or Lara, Davide, Taka, Jessica, Francesco... it is a revolution that our time is demanding out loud and that we have the responsibility of interpreting at the best of our possibilities.

Shifting from working for one's personal fulfilment to working for the society is a change of perspective that I have achieved, step by step, during a lifetime of sacrifice and hard work. Putting the best competence at the service of those in need is something we try to do every da



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with Food For Soul: we commit to creating spaces where the most vulnerable people can regain their dignity feeling welcomed, understood and appreciated. And this is also true for places. Before every refectory there was a disused and forgotten area of the neighbourhood; instead now there are new meeting places for the community, brimming with light. Before the menus, designed thanks to the creativity and time given by chefs from all over the world, there were overripe bananas, stale bread, imperfect vegetables that we have transformed looking at them with different eyes, to go beyond their appearance and be nourished by their substances. I am convinced that beautiful and good are two sides of the same coin: one cannot live without the other. Our purpose is making the invisible visible and exploiting its huge potential bringing the whole community on our side. For this new academic year, guys, I wish you all, first and foremost, to have the courage of believing in this change and carrying it on with passion, commitment and imagination. Sometimes beauty hurts because it is very demanding: uncomfortable changes, upsetting habits, making sacrifice, working more - especially on closing days. But when you manage to turn something ugly into something beautiful, you give dignity to your actions, your sacrifice, your effort. The potential of Beauty unveils in the transformation thanks to which our humanity can spontaneously express itself. Maybe this will save us, unite us at a point in time when the world is getting more and more divided. The power of beauty is the power of one, plus one, plus one, plus another... Today is already tomorrow and the future of the world counts on us. Thank you.