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Chef Massimo Bottura On Self-Doubt, Breaking Rules and Keeping The Door Open For The Unexpected

How this famously passionate Italian chef arrived at the top of the world, and what he's planning next.



Osteria Francescana

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By Jacqueline Parisi 23 JANUARY 2019

"Challenge yourself. Keep learning. Hard work. Have a dream. Create culture. Knowledge."

Stated as such, these trite remarks may sound like nothing more than banal

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platitudes. But for Massimo Bottura, patron of Osteria Francescana, they're so much more than that. Journy's very own Leiti Hsu caught up with him at an event cohosted by Eataly and the Italian magazine, Identità Golose, to learn more about his values and how they've guided him, skyrocketing his hometown Modena restaurant to the status of World #1.



Osteria Francescana

Bottura is the first to admit that he doesn't follow the rules.

"To bring everything into the future, you have to look at the past in a very critical way," he explains. "Learn everything, but then forget about everything. The truth is always there."

But that doesn't always mean it's pretty.

Recalling the early days of Osteria Francescana, Bottura—who thinks of himself as a poet and storyteller as much as a cook—recounts a time when eschewing nostalgia in favor of innovation backfired.

"We were serving just six tortellini walking on the broth—just to focus on the pasta and not have them get lost," he explains. "But the day after was the worst article in the local newspaper, saying that you're going to need to

eat pasta after eating in my restaurant. It didn't specify that you're eating 14-

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16 courses, though, and that six tortellini is enough. It didn't look at the quality inside there, the way we rolled the pasta by hand. The next day, the restaurant was totally empty. That was very bad."

It was only when Bottura managed to show the locals that he could cook better than their grandmother did the crowds start flooding in. And they haven't stopped since.

To date, Osteria Francescana has three Michelin stars, comes in at #1 on the Italian food guide, l'Espresso - Restaurant d'Italia, and just this year was crowned World's Best Restaurant.

And yet, when asked what's next, Bottura doesn't allude to more accolades. For now, just more refettorios, a soup kitchen initiative he founded in 2015—the goal of which is to upcycle surplus food to make meals for the underprivileged.

"One in Naples, one in Mexico and the first one in the US in San Francisco," reveals Bottura.



Osteria Francescana

Reimagined Italian fare may be this chef's bread and butter (after all, he *did*



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make artichoke velvet for his first date with now wife, Lara Gilmore), but when asked where in the world he'd go if he could transport himself anywhere, Bottura is quick to jetset elsewhere.

First stop, breakfast at the Nomad Hotel—following the requisite cup of coffee at his restaurant, of course. Then, off to Tokyo for a sushi lunch.

"I'm the only one in the world who can walk into Jiro without a reservation," he says, laughing. "But there aren't many places where they don't know me."

Elsewhere on the list? Any and all street food à la Dave Chang and an unrivaled negroni in the most unexpected of places... Singapore.

But when the sun sets, Bottura would undoubtedly be back in Modena, to the restaurant nestled down a narrow cobblestone street, doing what he did for years with his aptly-named Golden Retriever, Luna: snacking in the kitchen.

"Night time is spaghetti time," he says. "That is heaven for me."

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Oh—and if you're wondering what Bottura eats for breakfast, [we've got the inside scoop](#).



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