

#MEETTHEEXPERTS

# How Nicolas Mounard Turned His Passion For Travel, Food & International Development Into A Career

And how he's joining forces with World's 50 Best to make an even bigger impact.



Mounard speaking at the launch of Chefs For Change | 2018 World's 50 Best Awards | Basque Culinary Center | @chefs\_for\_change

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By Jacqueline Parisi 6 JUNE 2019

Nicolas Mounard has to constantly remind himself that he's doing what he always dreamed he'd be doing: working at the intersection of travel, food and development at [Farm Africa](#)—an environmental NGO

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that works to reduce poverty in eastern Africa by helping farmers grow and sell more, for more.

“There’s always a time that you forget that you’re actually doing exactly what you wanted to do 20 years ago,” he tells Journy's Leiti Hsu, “and over the last year I’ve had some really good reminders of how much I love what I do, and how lucky I am to be in New York one day, then Ethiopia, then London, then Nairobi. It’s truly amazing.”

Growing up in central France, Mounard always had an interest in food, and it was this interest that led him to [Alter Eco](#) France, a food company specializing in fair trade coffee, tea, rice, sugar, quinoa, chocolate and olive oil. He started as Produce Support Manager, and swiftly moved up the ranks to CFO, then CEO—working to improve processes to more effectively import products from different parts of the world to sell in France via their retail industry.

It was during this time that he also began traveling to meet the people behind the products—at one point visiting a coffee cooperative called Kopakama on Lake Kivu in Rwanda and coming across a group of about 150 female farmers who, in an effort to prove that they could achieve as profitable a yield as their male counterparts, had just purchased a piece of land for themselves.

“It was a beautiful story,” Mounard says, and one of the many that compelled him to engage more deeply with food—to look beyond gastronomic pleasure to the wider role that food plays in international development.

“I started to understand the huge history that is behind these products and the number of people who are involved, and it fascinated me. So I went deeper and deeper and met a lot of fascinating people, and that was the beginning of my journey.”

Fast forward to February 2016, and Mounard had assumed the role of CEO at Farm Africa, which equips farmers in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and

Uganda with the tools and expertise to increase their harvests, look after their livestock and make a living using their natural resources responsibly and sustainability.

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"I'm French, so I love food," Mounard jokes, "and I've always been willing to reconcile both sides of me: my love for eating and food, and my passion for development and travel."

It wasn't long after joining the NGO that Mounard began dreaming up what, at first glance, sounds like the unlikeliest of partnerships with Farm Africa: World's 50 Best Restaurant Awards. But if you look closely, there *is* a common thread tying together the world of haute cuisine and agricultural development: a willingness to look more intentionally at food.









"It's what I do and what they do," Mounard explains. "So we started to think, okay, how do we do this? How do we join both worlds?"

The answer? [Chefs For Change](#), a program uniting the world's best chefs (think Eneko Atxa, Joan Roca and Gaggan Anand) with the world's most remote rural communities to transform lives through sustainable farming.



Left to right: [Eneko Atxa](#), [Joan Roca](#) and [Gaggan Anand](#) at the 2018 World's 50 Best Awards at the Basque Culinary Center | [@chefs for change](#)

Chefs choose from a portfolio of 25 programs, including nutrition, gender equality, climate change, deforestation, seed production and waste. They then become the ambassadors of the program, traveling out of the kitchen

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and onto the farms to tell the stories of small-scale producers dedicating their lives to food production with the obstacles of environmental degradation, poverty and lack of access to markets standing in the way.



*Gaggan Anand in the rice fields of Tanzania | [@chefs\\_for\\_change](#)*

“The chefs’ role is, really, to shed light on this program, to embrace this program and then to talk about it,” Mounard explains. “We don’t need them to do the job [of the farmers]; we need them to talk about it. And we want to use their profile—their voice—to talk about the importance of agricultural development and how, by supporting agriculture in the developing world, you can actually solve a wide range of big issues.”



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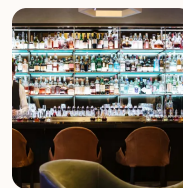
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