

TAPESCRIPT: The Best Chef of the Year

You are going to listen to Maria Carnelos, the 'Best Chef of the Year', talking to a reporter about herself.

SECTION ONE

Reporter: Where do you come from Maria?

Maria: Well, although I live in New York, I come from Greece.

Reporter: I see. How did you decide to open a restaurant?

Maria: I studied accounting because this was the dream of my parents, who wanted their children to have a better life than the one they had. I was preparing for higher studies when I decided to work as a waitress. I immediately fell in love with the restaurant business. My parents were very unhappy about this, but there was no way I was going to change my mind. It was love at first sight.

Reporter: And why did you decide to become a chef?

Maria: Well, about ten years after I opened my first restaurant, which I am very proud of, the chef left one day without any warning. He took two of my cooks with him and started his own restaurant. I was very upset, because I depended on other people. Until that day I had never cooked on a professional basis, but I decided I had to learn in case something like this happened again. When I got into the kitchen, I realised what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. By chance, a very famous food critic came to my restaurant and wrote about it. Then more critics came, more chefs and more people. I was very excited that great chefs came to try my cuisine.

SECTION TWO

Reporter: How would you characterise your cuisine?

Maria: I try to cook Greek food, but not in the same way my grandmother did. For example, I have a dish with rabbit and snails. When I first thought about this, I said: 'Why have these two served together? They are not a common combination.' Then I remembered that my mother made a rabbit stew with tomatoes, onions and cinnamon. She also cooked snails with the same ingredients. So I made a combination with these two things that agreed with each other! I also made rabbit moussaka. I use fresh pasta, rabbit, potato rings with pickles in cinnamon, aubergines, courgettes, béchamel and black truffle oil. When you eat this, you think of moussaka, because the ingredients are there, but it is a very light dish. I may look at a classic dish in a different way, in a way that sees the old and the new, or I work with no rules and create dishes that my customers realise are Greek only after they have tasted them.

SECTION THREE

Reporter: Is taste the basic aim of your dishes?

Maria: Taste is not the only important thing. You have to create food that is studied and enjoyed by your mind. If you can combine the two, then you are cooking at a very high level. After all, what is food? Food is an art. My life is filtered but also expressed through my cooking. I want the people who eat my food to feel the same way I felt while I was cooking it. Then I know I have been successful.

Reporter: What is more important, talent or technique?

Maria: Technique is the basis of all cooking. If I were to start from the beginning, I would study and train in the restaurants of great chefs. After you develop your technique, you need imagination and art in order to make the food 'your own' and to leave your mark. So I would say that both are equally important.