

# Get Cooking

Want to take your cooking skills from a slow simmer to a full-on red-hot rolling boil? Consider a cooking class or two. We promise, you'll love the homework. By **Lisa-Ann Lee**



Photo courtesy of Angeline Poon

It is two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon and already the studio kitchen at **Palate Sensations** (#03-05 1 Westbourne Rd., 6479-9025, [www.palatesensations.com](http://www.palatesensations.com)) is a flurry of activity as students of the Advanced Cooking Skills class set up their work stations and prepare for the task ahead. Today's lesson will see them preparing a gravlax of king salmon with potato galette, sour cream and herb salad; pan-seared duck breast with sweet potato mash and snow peas; and crème caramel.

"So which dish should you prepare first?" asks instructor François Mermilliod, whose other day job sees him running French restaurant Absinthe. There is a low murmur from the students. "You need to prepare the crème caramel first because ...?"

"It needs time to set," comes the answer. As the students set about measuring the ingredients for the dessert, Mermilliod continues testing his charges. "When making caramel, why shouldn't you stir it?"

This time, they answer without missing a beat. "Because the sugar will crystallize."

"Careful," he tells one. "You know there's a very thin line between caramel and burnt sugar, yes?"

Mermilliod is in his fourth year as an instructor at Palate Sensations. "When I was first approached to teach, I thought, let's give it a try and do something different. It's about having fun and sharing knowledge with people who don't necessarily want to become professional chefs. And since [Absinthe] is not open for lunch on Saturdays, I thought why not do these poor people, who don't know anything, a favor?" he deadpans.

But it's not just kitchen novices who are signing up for the classes. Reflecting on the growing popularity of cooking classes at Palate Sensations, managing director Lynette Foo says: "Our classes are popular because people are able to have a hands-on [experience] and also, they get to meet like-minded people. A lot of my clients are serious foodies who have traveled the world and they want to be able to translate what they have tasted overseas into their kitchen for entertainment." Sometimes, the love of food translates into love between students. Says Foo: "Our school has resulted in two marriages—not that we started out as a matchmaking place but it's just like-minded people coming together." She also adds that while the classes are great for boosting the skills of the home chef, they can also help lay the groundwork for those looking to go pro.

Indeed, for former project manager Angeline Poon, the skills and confidence she picked up from Mermilliod's classes have been invaluable. "Two years ago, I was looking for a hands-on cooking school in Singapore and I came across Palate Sensations on the Internet. I had never tried French cooking before, so I decided to give it a go and started taking classes under François. After I finished all his classes, I decided to sign up for the Grand Diplôme culinary and patisserie program at Le Cordon Bleu Sydney. The skills I learned here gave me the basics so I didn't have to struggle as much [as some of the other students]."



Photo courtesy of Angeline Poon



Chef François Mermilliod adding the final touches to a dish at Palate Sensations

Photo courtesy of Angeline Poon

## Get your hands dirty

Cooking, baking, cake decorating, making sushi ... we've got them all covered.

### At-Sunrice GlobalChef Academy

The Personal & Leisure Chef program offers amateurs the chance to learn the techniques employed in professional kitchens. Classes take place over eight Saturdays and participants will receive instruction in cooking fundamentals; learn how to prepare soups, stocks and sauces; and get a good grasp of the essentials of local, Western, Chinese and Thai cooking.

\$\$\$: \$2,300

**Find it here:** Fort Canning Centre, Fort Canning Park, 6336-3307. [www.at-sunrice.com](http://www.at-sunrice.com).

### Bake-It-Yourself (B-I-Y)

If you'd like to try your hand at cake decorating, then make your way to this specialty baking store. B-I-Y offers Wilton cake decorating classes for everyone, including amateurs. You'll learn how to work with different frosting mediums such as buttercream, royal icing, fondant and gum paste as well as how to pipe flowers and borders, and turn your cakes into a work of art.

For those who'd like to make a career out of cake decorating, B-I-Y also offers the PME professional diploma course. Named for PME Knightsbridge, the British manufacturer of sugarcraft tools, it consists of three modules—sugarpaste, sugar flowers, and royal icing and piping. Apart from cake decorating courses, B-I-Y also offers candy-making and 3D cake sculpting classes. And with Christmas just around the corner, you can also expect a host of Christmas-themed classes as well.

\$\$\$: \$270-280 for the Wilton cake decorating courses. Each course is made up of four two-and-a-half-hour lessons. Each module on the PME professional diploma course costs \$650 and comprises five five-hour lessons. Students who complete all three modules will get a PME professional masters certificate.

**Find it here:** 182 Bukit Timah Rd., 6887-1258. [www.b-i-y.com](http://www.b-i-y.com)

### Creative Culinaire

So you love to bake but you can't figure out why your loaves never seem to rise or why your cakes have more holes than Swiss cheese? Cooking school Creative Culinaire offers a wide selection of hands-on baking classes. Ideal for the casual home baker are its two- and four-day foundation classes in cake and artisan bread baking, and wedding cake assembly and decoration. There are also a number of one-day hands-on classes, including Christmas cooking workshops for parents and children.

For those who are toying with the idea of baking as a career, or who want to get an idea of what life in a bakery is really like, there's also a 14-day professional baking program. Apart from teaching you how to bake, it will also give you a grounding in things like baker's math, nutrition and food allergies, and bakery and waste management.

\$\$\$: \$340 for the four-day foundation courses; \$3,000 for the 14-day professional course

**Find it here:** 17 Eng Hoon Street, #01-03 Eng Hoon Mansions, 6324-1663. [www.creativeculinaire.com](http://www.creativeculinaire.com).

### California Sushi Academy (Singapore)

You love eating sushi, but how about learning to make your own? At the California Sushi Academy, participants can sign up for the popular Roll Your Own Sushi workshop and learn how to make rice treats. Apart from this workshop, it also conducts a number of other hands-on classes for the public throughout the year. In the past, these have included classes on udon making and Japanese home cooking.

Now, if Japanese cuisine is your passion and you're thinking of a career in this field, the academy also offers a professional program, which is the first Japanese culinary training program of its kind to be conducted in English.

Its cooking trips, which take place every three months, are also another popular highlight at the academy. Says the school's programming manager, Jernine Pang: "These trips are meant as an extension of what students (professional or leisure) have learned in the classroom. This is one way the Academy takes Japanese food and culture education beyond the classroom to allow non-Japanese to experience Japanese food culture up-close just like a native Japanese would. (Visiting) famous, must-try historical restaurants, and experiencing Tokyo nightlife (and not feeling intimidated) are definite highlights of the trip. Our instructors are also on-site to explain food etiquette and culture."

\$\$\$: \$120 (inclusive of ingredients, notes, recipes and bamboo mat) for the Roll Your Own Sushi workshop; fees start from \$9,900 for the professional program. Cooking trips start from \$550 per person and are inclusive of airfare, accommodation, course fees and meals. The next trip to Tokyo will be taking place on Jan 20, 2010.

**Find it here:** 6339-9626, [www.learnssushi.org](http://www.learnssushi.org).



Roll your own sushi class



Pros at work at California Sushi Academy