

La Brigade de Cuisine



HISTORY

The Kitchen Brigade

The guide to kitchen organization.

By LILY STARBUCK

The **brigade de cuisine** was codified just over one hundred years ago by chef Auguste Escoffier as a way to streamline the roles of kitchen staff, from executive chefs to dishwashers. Today, Escoffier's model informs the hierarchy in the majority of restaurant and hotel kitchens. Here's how it works, with commentary from chef Eric Ripert, of Le Bernardin in New York City.

"The brigade is only supposed to make everyone's life simple, easy, and comfortable. It is neither abusive nor nice; it's neutral. It is a machine that can put hot, clean, delicious plates in front of the right person in a timely manner. That's why the brigade was invented and continues to be used today." —Eric Ripert

EXECUTIVE CHEF



An experienced chef who plays a largely supervisory role: managing the business aspects of the kitchen (money, food orders), creating the menu, and directing the staff. Executive chef and chef de cuisine roles may sometimes be interchangeable, depending on the restaurant's size and structure. In larger restaurants or hotels—especially ones with multiple locations—the executive chef is more of a figurehead whose day-to-day work likely involves little active cooking.

“The executive chef is in charge of the entire team. At restaurants or hotels where the expectations are as they are at Le Bernardin, the role of executive chef is more administrative and less hands-on. But here, it’s me, and I’m very hands-on. I try to know everything and be everywhere. I’m involved in every project. I also believe that my role here is to be the head creative person as well.

“During service, the executive chef calls out the tickets as they come into the kitchen. I say, ‘One tuna carpaccio, three langoustines, two lobsters!’ Every station responds, ‘Yes, chef!’ That’s important: you need everyone to be aware of his or her responsibilities. The last thing you want is an entire table ready and one cook didn’t hear you, and then you have to redo the table.”

CHEF DE CUISINE



An active chef in charge of the entire kitchen/team. In smaller restaurants, this person is the executive chef and has the same roles listed above. In larger restaurants, the chef de cuisine reports to the executive chef, who is likely not in the kitchen every day.

SOUS CHEF



Reports to and works directly under the chef de cuisine. Aids in overall kitchen management. Can serve as a representative of the kitchen when the chef de cuisine is away.

“The sous chefs are basically management people. They verify invoices and handle ordering but they’re also there to support their teams when they need an extra pair of hands. They make sure the stations are set up on time and that the kitchen is clean.

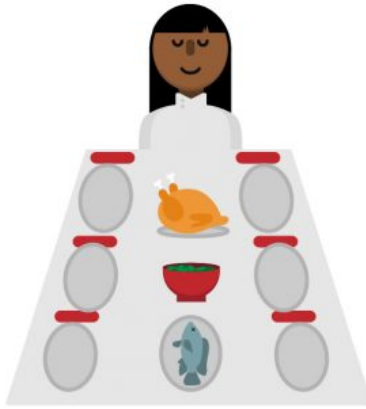
“During service, the sous chefs are on the pass. The pass is the table where we finish the plates, clean the plates, call the orders, double check that the orders go to the right station, and test the food before it goes out to the dining room. It’s a very important job! Sous chefs are really managers, which is why they need to be masters of every station and understand the dynamic of the restaurant.”

ABOYEUR



Communicates between the kitchen and front-of-house. Checks dishes and makes sure the meal is paced properly.

COMMUNARD



Prepares staff meal.

CHEF DE PARTIE

Senior cooks, line cooks.

Each is the head of a particular station, which prepares specific dishes or types of cuisine. This includes:

SAUCIER

Sauce chef.



Considered the most respected of the *chefs de partie*, the saucier often reports directly to one of the sous chefs. Their central role is preparation of sauces and possibly sautéed dishes.

“The sauce station is the most important station for young cooks. They should spend the most time there. This is where cooking goes from a craft to an art, because creativity enters the equation.”

“Sauces are technically the most difficult to learn because they are the marriage of craftsmanship and consistency. It takes years to learn how to properly make the sauces—and that’s only half the job of a saucier. Then you have to spend another few years learning how to actually execute them on a day-to-day basis.”

“Young cooks need to be patient. They should take their time, especially at the beginning of their career, because they will never go back. Whatever you miss when you are young lasts forever. ‘Chef’ is a title, but it doesn’t make you a good cook—only time will do that.”

RÔTISSEUR



Responsible for the roasting and braising of meats. In the traditional Escoffier brigade, the rôtiisseur would also be in charge of the *grillardin* and *friturier*. Today, he or she may simply take on these roles.

Grillardin

Grill cook.

In charge of the grill, specifically grilled meats.

Friturier

Fry cook.

Takes care of all frying, specifically deep-frying.

POISSONIER

Fish cook.



Prepares and oversees all fish and seafood dishes. This position usually involves butchering the fish as well. Restaurants with an emphasis on shellfish may also employ an *écailler*.

Écailler

Prepares *fruits de mer* or shellfish (i.e., shucking oysters).

ENTREMÊTIER



Entrée preparer/manager. Note that an entrée, under Escoffier, is a starter and not a main dish. Thus, the *entremétier* traditionally handles vegetable, egg, or soup dishes—generally things that do not involve meat. He or she may supervise the *potager* and *legumier* or take on these roles.

Potager

Soup cook.

Prepares all soups. This is a station that can take residual kitchen “waste”—vegetable ends, meat scraps, and fish carcasses—and put it to good use.

Legumier

Vegetable chef.

Focuses mostly on hot preparation of vegetables.

“Le Bernardin is a seafood restaurant, so we have four stations to deal with fish: poaching, roasting, sautéing, and sauce. There are two other main stations, dealing mostly with cold dishes and starters. These are the entremétier —what you could call the vegetable station—and the garde manger, which itself has two branches: overseeing appetizers and keeping an eye on the fish.”

GARDE MANGER



Responsible for most cold preparations: salads, charcuterie plates, and other cold hors d'oeuvres. They are also in charge of the pantry. If a restaurant has their own *boucher* or *charcutier*, the garde manger will oversee these roles.

Boucher

Butcher.

Oversees butchering of meat and poultry.

Charcutier

Person in charge of charcuterie.

PÂTISSIEUR

Pastry chef.



Makes desserts, sweets, and can prepare pasta. If a restaurant has no *boulangier*, the *pâtissier* will oversee breads and baked goods. This position usually has one or several cooks underneath it.

Glacier

Ice-cream cook.

Boulangier

Baker.

Makes breads and certain pastries.

COMMIS

Junior cooks.



Work at specific stations under one of the chefs de partie. They are responsible for the tools at their station. Also described as a kind of apprentice who is usually a recent graduate of culinary school.

STAGIARE



Often a student gaining practical experience in the kitchen. Usually does not start out at a specific station, like the *commis*, but must work his/her way up doing other tasks, like peeling vegetables.

PLONGEUR or ESCUELERIE

Dishwashers.



Reporting contributed by Emily Johnson. Interview with Eric Ripert conducted by Ryan Healey.

BRIGADE, ERIC RIPERT, ESCOFFIER
