

So you want to become a chef?

Some of us are born with a fascination with the art of preparing food, or at least playing with it. There's something magical about mixing up some seemingly incongruous ingredients that looks like a mysterious mess, popping it in the oven and then removing a dish that looks, smells and tastes absolutely wonderful. When you go to a fancy dinner house, it's the chef who is ultimately responsible for the fine looking plate that's set before you. There's a certain mystique about the chef which makes him or her a romantic figure to the aspiring gourmet. If you dream of becoming a chef, let's take a look at what it takes. The professional chef has earned his status through years of dedication and training.

Most chefs do begin the road to professional status at an early age. The four-star chefs you read of in foodie articles have a love of food and ingredients that's difficult for most of us to match. This fascination bordering on obsession is perhaps the most important characteristic. To become a chef of distinction, this is an absolute must.

Another signature of the person who ultimately becomes a chef is an inordinate interest in cookbooks that extends to cuisines around the world. Books on the art and techniques of cooking are consumed like candy. Does this sound familiar? If so, you're on the right track to becoming a chef.

There comes a time when you need to expand your horizons with some professional experience. It's easy enough to get a job in the kitchen of a dinner house, especially when you're a knowledgeable foodie. You may start out as the salad chef's assistant. Chefs do have a notorious reputation for being temperamental. They are artists in their own right, you know. So you may take frequent tongue lashings for an improperly placed garnish or some such. If you want to become a chef, this is just part of paying your dues. If you can survive the experience graciously, congratulations. You probably have what it takes to become a chef.

Depending on your location and the restaurant, you may be able to work your way up. However, there's nothing like professional training in a culinary school to hone your skills. A stint at Le Cordon Bleu or the Culinary Institute will enhance your chances to advance, as well as your viable opportunities, exponentially. The training you'll receive is intensive and sometimes grueling, for the finest chefs are absolute perfectionists.

In the end, becoming a chef requires a great passion and respect for food as well as a lot of hard work. However, then you'll be that romantic figure behind the veil, serving your guests the meal they'll be talking about for months to

come. Not a bad reward.