# Things That Make French Food Amazing

A lot of shade gets thrown at the French for, frankly, being uncompromisingly French. They're teased for their underwhelming economy, and they're accused of nurturing a deeply held conviction of their own superiority.

However, when it comes to popular French food, the French sense of entitlement sits comfortably on solid ground.

**French Gastronomy**

French gastronomy is where many cuisines aspired to be. Revered at home, respected abroad, traditional French food holds a very special and enduring place in the hearts of the French.

Whether it's the amazing flair the French demonstrate with all things pastry, their decadently rich sauces or their deep relationship with regional cheese and wines, it's easy to understand why our love affair with French food has endured.

French food is more than just a melding of recipes and fresh ingredients. It's about celebrating the daily rituals of cooking with a certain élan.

**Blending Food With Life**

The French bring an undeniable panache to the art of gastronomy, to the way they think about traditional French food and how the French seem to effortlessly blend food with life. Here are 10 ways the French have enriched our culinary lives:

1. France Bequeathed Champagne To The World: While many countries produce sparkling wine, there is only one Champagne1
2. Pain Au Chocolat (Chocolate Croissants) For Breakfast: Who else could take a pastry dish loaded with butter and layer in chocolate but the French? Big breakfasts are not the French way. rather, they eat a small breakfast of toast with jam or a delicate pastry, a croissant, or chocolate croissant, surely the queen of pastries
3. Lunch Is An Endurance Sport: No grabbing a quick sandwich hunched over your keyboard in la belle France's small towns and country villages, it remains the norm for people to return home to eat a leisurely, three-course lunch, sigh!
4. Wine Is Mandatory With Meals: The French are at their insouciant best when it comes to drinking wine at lunch and dinner. Just a glass or two is considered to complement and enhance the meal's intrinsic flavours
5. Butter Is One Of Life's Essentials: The secret to fine French cuisine lies with their commitment to butter. French sauces are built around butter. Their pastries are subsumed in butter. It helps that France is home to some of the world's finest butter. Normandy butter, in particular, is famed for its

bright yellow colour. Moreover, French butter is almost always salted, the way butter is intended to be

6. France Is Passionate About Cheese: France makes around 350 to 400 distinct types of cheeses. This riot of cheese making prompted Charles de Gaulle, the legendary French general and President to say, “How can you govern a country that makes over 256 kinds of cheese?” So much cheese, so little time
7. French Wine: One of the largest wine producers in the world. French wine traces its ancestry back to the 6th century BC, with many of France's regions dating to Roman times. Today, regions such as Burgundy, Bordeaux and Champagne are legendary with oenophiles around the globe
8. French Is The Language Of Chefs: There’s a reason the world adopted French terminology for our restaurant staff. The French lay claim to having invented fine cuisine and who are we to argue?
9. Mille-Feuille pastry has a thousand-layers. This classic old-school French pastry is airy, crispy, flaky, and sublimely decadent. No wonder it’s enjoying a renaissance
10. Macarons Rock: Many believe Macarons are the French cupcakes. Supremely seductive, macarons are a meringue-and almond-based confection made in a dizzying range of flavours and a rainbow of colours. Common flavours include raspberry, pistachio, coffee, chocolate, passionfruit, orange blossom and salted caramel

**Paris Restaurants Flagships For Traditional French Food**

Over the past decade, Paris has boldly reclaimed its title as Europe’s best food city. Today, the French capital is teeming with a brilliant constellation of new culinary stars as talented young chefs tempt patrons with an inventive range of dining options.

Paris food comes in a dining style to suit every appetite, from casual through to Michelin starred fine dining. There's also been a renaissance amongst its traditional gastronomic landscape, including Paris’ quintessential bistros, classic brasseries, and stylish restaurants serving elegant French cooking.

Leading this resurgence in the art of cooking is France’s Michelin starred restaurants. France has more Michelin starred restaurants than any other country and Paris is home to almost a quarter of them.

Here are the Top Five 3-Michelin-Star dining experiences in Paris:

**1. Alain Ducasse at the Plaza Athénée Hotel**

One of the world’s most celebrated chefs, Alain Ducasse has been criticised for being more a brand than a chef. One of the ground-breaking celebrity chefs,

Ducasse rarely cooks for diners these days, however, he hasn't lost his commitment to discovering new ways to reinvent French cuisine.

Little wonder Ducasse's flagship restaurant at the Plaza Athénée stands out from a venerable line up of Paris' foody aristocrats.  Here, the focus is on a healthy troika of fish, vegetables and cereals, using only the highest-quality natural produce.

Few restaurants can rival the Plaza Athénée aesthetics or lineage. Crowned with crystal chandeliers, its blingified interiors are loosely anchored on an under-the-sea theme. While the light-drenched room enlivened by a seamless service, is truly sumptuous, Ducasse's audacious cooking remains the star.

Vegetables are sourced locally, mostly from the chef's Jardin de la Reine located at the Château de Versailles, while his bonnotte potatoes, come from Brittany's Island of Noirmoutier. The fluffy gourmet potatoes with their slight earthy taste effortlessly complement the crisp blue Cotentin lobster, following a starter of lentil caviar in a delicately smoked jelly.

The main course is brilliantly presented Atlantic sea bass with Clementine confit and white asparagus. For dessert, do not go past the Landes apricots served with avocado and fresh almond tofu. All in all, a truly original gourmet experience.

**2. Christian Le Squer at Le Cinq, Four Seasons George V Hotel**

When Christian Le Squer became head chef at the George V, one of the city's most venerable hotels, he started with just two Michelin stars. A year he received a well-earned third star.

Le Squer's simplicity is the defining trait of Le Cinq's cuisine. Le Cinq exudes French old-world charm with its exuberantly classical Franco-English floral swathed interiors complete with original period features.

Opulent decore and superb service aside, the bedrock of Le Squer's unostentatious cuisine is its natural Brittany produce such as the scallop mousseline starter served with Breton galette de sarrasin and the main of delicate sweet white cod with raisins in olive oil.

Le Squer's absolute command of his artistry is illustrated by his signature deconstructed soupe à l'onion. Imbued with divine flavours and masterfully executed, Le Squer's cuisine combines timeless traditional French classics with a restrained modern flair to deliver an exquisite dining experience.

Little wonder Le Cinq's icon status remains unchallenged in all its sumptuous Parisian grandeur.

**3. Yannick Alléno at Pavillon Ledoyen**

Having left his former base at Le Meurice, Yannick Alléno took over the historic Pavillon Ledoyen, where he achieved his third Michelin star in just a few months.

Alléno is a true master of a precisely engineered cuisine, which treads a high-wire act between being both avant-garde and anchored to its traditional French origins. Nothing illustrates this better than Alléno's flamboyant reduction sauces, which have become his trademark. The location is also adds to the overall ambience. The 18th-century Pavillon Ledoyen evokes a long vanished time, and exudes that je ne sai quois old-world Parisian charm visitors flock to embrace.

Seated at one of Pavillon Ledoyen's round tables set in brilliant white cloth, you'll glimpse the venue's opulent history. Diners are greeted with a selection of champagnes on ice. A sculptural yet succulent Tarbouriech oyster is cut out of a delicate chamomile jelly with pistachio extraction and laid back into its shell on a porous rock resting languidly on a bed of algae.

A tender scallop mousse lounging on a lollypop stick and button mushroom meringue complements the tangy urchin to complete the dish. Other highlights include a tart urchin and Rouget fish dish and tender young spiced milk-fed lamb cooked in molecular style served with piquant oriental couscous.

Mastery of French classics while adding an unmistakably contemporary touch is what makes Pavillon Ledoyen an indulgent dining experience unlike any other in Paris.

**4. Alain Passard's Arpège**

Arpège's mission is to remind us that nothing compares with eating flavoursome fresh produce in season. A passion for selecting the best seasonal ingredients set Alain Passard aside from his competition. Grown in the chef's own biodynamic gardens, Passard's vegetables represent a deeply sensual experience.

While the vegetable focus was initially seen as audacious in a famously carnivorous city, Passard's pioneering move earned him a third Michelin star in 1996, decades before the seasonal farm-to-table trend caught fire.

By comparison with the dazzling image of many comparable three-star restaurants, Arpège is rather anonymous, hiding discretely behind a frosted glass door just across the road from the Musée Rodin.

Passard's inviting fuss-free restaurant comprises a bright upstairs dining area and a more subdued and romantic space downstairs in an atmospheric vaulted stone basement.

Born in Brittany, the chef grew up surrounded by world-class produce. So, its no surprise Passard wanted to recreate the sensory cooking experience of his childhood. Stand-outs among his elegant and sophisticated menu include beetroot sushi, flavoured with geranium oil and celery tagliatelle complemented by creamy mushrooms sprinkled with hazelnuts and soused with parmesan and thyme sauce.

The velvety butternut squash arrayed with slices of piquant smoked ham is similarly enchanting, as is his divine beetroot 'steak' tartare. Passard's menu changes almost daily depending on the produce delivered in small artisanal batches straight from the farm to the restaurant every morning.

When dessert inevitably comes around, diners simply must indulge in the chef's signature apple rose tart festooned with flamboyant ribbons of organic apple coiled to resemble rose buds. It is every bit as delicious as it is decorative.

**5. Guy Savoy at La Monnaie de Paris**

Guy Savoy's favourite quote is, "Cooking is the art of being able to instantly transform produce laden with history into joy." Set in red neon letters, on the wall of Savoy's Paris flagship restaurant, it's a timely reminder of one chef's passion for his art. For the doyen of Nouvelle Cuisine, cooking combines the art of artisan precision with an absolute respect for natural produce, complemented by a deeply felt desire to please his diners.

La Monnaie de Paris is located on the banks of the River Seine and resembles an elegant hotel. The updated historic interiors evoke centuries-old soul thanks to their original period features such as ornate mouldings and open fireplaces. Large floor-to-ceiling windows present delightful river views, glimpses of the tip of the Ile de la Cité and the palatial Louvre.

Savoy's epic culinary tour de force begins with delicate leek feuilleté tartlets and smooth artichoke and black truffle soup hors-d'oeuvres. Sensuous Saint-Jacques scallops and the Rouget barbet 'en situation' garnished with a succulent iodic oyster brings to the forefront the full flavour of the buttery white fish follow these delights.

This is followed in quick succession by a perfectly runny poached egg doused in sublime black truffle shavings. Next appears a classic French quasi de veau cooked in a crust, in a cocotte, succeed by venison served with hearty champignons and seared foie gras, truly the meal's plat de résistance.

A trolley appears bearing a selection of Marie Quatrehomme cheeses with the meal finishing on a wickedly seductive note of black chocolate fondant.

**Understanding French Food**

To truly understand the French dining mentality, you have to look beyond the fresh regional ingredients and the masterful techniques.

As the enduringly popular French recipes demonstrate, the things that make French food amazing come back to food simply being a way of life as the popular French recipes demonstrate.

**Popular French Recipes**

On one level, there is nothing terribly unique about the most popular French food. What is unique is how passionately obsessive the French are about their culinary tradition and culture.

From the farm gate to the dining room table, every French man, woman and child is totally obsessive when it comes to food popular French food. These recipes are the Top 10 most enduringly popular French dishes:

1. Roast Chicken: OK, the French can't claim total ownership of roast chicken as a concept. However, it remains unapologetically the single most popular French dish. The secret to a great roast chicken French style is in basting the bird with butter during roasting. Toss an onion into your roasting tray, skip the stuffing and you have a traditional French roast chicken, best accompanied by potatoes and green beans
2. Boeuf Bourguignon: France's iconic beef stew is a traditional recipe from Burgundy. Cooked in a rich red wine sauce with bacon, mushrooms, carrots and onions to add flavour coupled with beef stock, thyme and garlic
3. Mussels Mariniere: A popular summer recipe with visitors to France's Mediterranean and Atlantic coastlines. Fresh mussels are cooked for around five minutes in a white wine sauce with onion, thyme, bay leaf and parsley
4. Sole Meuniere: A staple of Normand, the sole is cooked in a rich butter sauce with a dab of flour and lemon juice and usually accompanied by green vegetables or rice
5. Pot Au Feu: A classical rural family meal from Normandy, comprising boiled beef with pork, chicken and vegetables. The beef simmers slowly for four and a half hours as it extracts all its delicious flavour
6. Choucroute (Sauerkraut): Similar to its German cousin, French sauerkraut hails from Alsace and can be tracked back six centuries. Based on a fermented cabbage, choucroute includes bacon, pork knuckle and sausages together with juniper berries and a slurp of Alsatian white wine
7. Blanquette de Veau (Veal Stew): Another of Normandy's popular stews. The veal simmers in a white sauce made from egg yolks, whipped cream and lemon juice with mushrooms and onions and is served with rice
8. Lamb Navarin: The French are fond of their stews. Navarin is derived from "navet" or turnips in French. Essential ingredients include home made lamb stock, carrots and tomatoes
9. Cassoulet: An enigmatic recipe from France's southwest, each local French village has its own version of this recipe. Cassoulet is a flavoursome blend of white beans and either lamb, pork, mutton or sausage depending on the village
10. Bouillabaisse: France's iconic soup recipe. Bouillabaisse is indelibly connected to Marseille on France's sun-soaked Mediterranean coast. The recipe uses fish and seafood sourced locally, including scorpion fish,

monkfish and crabs. Provencal herbs and a glug of olive oil round out the recipe.

**Final Point**

French cuisine evokes images of complex food, sumptuous indulgent cordon bleu cooking and swanky Michelin starred Paris restaurants. However, with the right fresh ingredients, techniques, and dining psychology, you can create amazing French meals in your own kitchen.

French food may still be the epitome of sophisticated dining, ultimately about creating a harmonious dish that showcases the quality of the main ingredients.

Perhaps though, the unique aspect of French gastronomy is the influence it has exerted over the world approach to cooking. From Germany to Britain, Scandinavian, Canada, and America through to Australia, chefs have warmly embraced the French style of cooking as well as their passion for French food.