



## Eel, El Bulli and Izakaya with Chef Ken Oringer

An interview with one of Boston's premiere chefs, Ken Oringer.



You can't talk about Boston's dining scene and not mention Chef Ken Oringer. First seen just as a charming chef with a promising fresh style, Oringer has established himself as a force. More than five restaurants (**Clio**, **Uni**, **Toro**, **Coppa**, **La Verdad** and **KO Prime**), each with a well-executed different cuisine (French, Japanese, Tapas, Italian, Mexican and steak), all significant destinations. In this interview, one of the city's premier chefs talks about his mentors, food blogs, and culinary rites of passage.

**What is the most important/memorable thing you learned from each of your mentors?**

From Jacques Pépin, I'd say the importance of French classics and French country cooking...and to utilize every part of every ingredient. From David Burke, that no ideas are too crazy. From Jean Georges, that combining French technique with exotic ingredients from Asia can make a cuisine that is more than the sum of its parts. From Michael Bras, to embrace the foods from right outside your front door and to express yourself from your region.

**In an interview you noted that years ago you befriended a Cambodian cook named Nieth who took you to restaurants where you experienced flavor profiles that inspired the direction you wanted your food to take. What dish at each of your restaurants most exemplifies the philosophy that inspired?**

At **Clio**, the cassoulet of sea urchin and lobster with parsnip milk and crunchy shallots. At **Uni**, Kumamoto oysters with red ginger ponzu, caviar and pickled mustard seeds. At **Toro**, confit of smoked beef tongue with salsa verde and green lentils. At **Coppa**, the pizza with caramelized cauliflower, anchovies and lemon zest. At **Verdad**, huarache with chorizo, pineapple, crema, cilantro and avocado. At **KO Prime**, cocteles of shrimp with tostones.

**You've done extensive travel that you've said has influenced your cuisine. Is there a next great culinary destination you want to explore?**

Next place is deep into the countryside of Japan to try more izakaya and kaiseki.

**Are there culinary rites of passage — things cooks need to learn the hard way — and were there any for you?**

Yes, I think every cook should learn how to kill and skin a live eel. Every cook should learn to fabricate whole animals. Every cook should learn how to make a foie gras torchon. For me, it was all of the above and then some.

**You spent time at El Bulli with Ferran Adrià years ago and helped spread the word about him Stateside before he blew up. Any one thing that most made an impression on you that changed your culinary philosophy?**

It made me see how creativity has no bounds. That you really can be playful and have a sense of humor with food. You can also look at food as an intellect, not just as an artisan.

**What's your philosophy on family meal?**

I strongly believe in it, but it doesn't mean we serve it at all my restaurants.

**What's your philosophy on the shift drink (a post-shift drink on the house)?**

I am all for it, as long as everybody has it together. Talking about food and restaurants builds camaraderie among the team.

**Some chefs say they don't read food blogs. But one chef told me never to buy that line. What's your take on the food blogosphere? Any blogs you read regularly?**

I think blogs are great, entertaining, and keep anyone informed on what's happening anywhere.

**Grub Street New York** helps me keep up on the scene there and I also check in on **Kenji's Food Lab**.

**Is there any one sandwich, burger, pizza, or dish of any kind that over the years you've driven or traveled a significant distance out of your way to eat?**

I will drive out of my way for anything Mexican, spicy, and anything out of the ordinary. I will not just drive but walk endlessly to get there. I have driven a lot of people crazy doing this...

**What ingredient are you most looking forward to experimenting with in 2011?**

I would have to say goat and Japanese fish.