

# TRAILBLAZING AMERICAN CHEFS YOU SHOULD KNOW

They may not be household names, but these legends helped shape how we cook and dine today

BY ANDREW FRIEDMAN

**HISTORY'S BANDWIDTH** can be sadly narrow when it comes to chefs.

To make sense of the past, historians simplify and consolidate, focusing on people who fit neatly into game-changing movements and trends. This makes for compelling storytelling; it also, unfortunately, erases or minimizes people who contributed but don't reinforce a larger narrative arc. And, because restaurants are chefs' chief platform, those who no longer own and operate them tend to fade from memory more quickly.

American chefdom is rife with talents who delighted countless eaters, schooled future chefs, or moved the culinary football forward, but aren't household names, and in many cases,

not widely known even among their professional descendants—today's cooks.

The 25 chefs listed here are sometimes mentioned in books, articles, or documentaries, but haven't attained the renown of, say, Wolfgang Puck or Alice Waters. In a pre-Internet age, some lived in under-the-radar places. Others cooked food so distinct that they couldn't be grouped with their contemporaries. Still others simply weren't self-promoters, or were anti-social, which—let's not kid ourselves—makes a difference in who receives accolades and who doesn't. Some became better known for other accomplishments such as books and cook-books. And some simply died too young or have

been out of the restaurant game for decades. But all deserve their due.

Making this list required tough choices; we tried to include men and women of different backgrounds, geography, and generations, and debated who demanded greater attention and who was already properly appreciated or remembered. (We also confined ourselves to the savory realm rather than settling for a too-short sampling of pastry chefs.)

Here, then, are 25 chefs who helped shape our modern culinary and industry landscape, listed to the best of our ability, in chronological order according to when they first made their defining impact.