

Daughters of the Revolution

Local female chefs share their stories



Deborah Scott

Chef Deborah Scott | Island Prime
What were your earliest experiences in a professional kitchen like?

I started out working with European chefs, and they tend to be very structured and stick with tradition. There was a certain element of restraint and they really didn't take well to women in the kitchen—at least when I started out 15 or 20 years ago. That was a bit of an uphill climb, but in order to be a female chef, I think you need to have a certain amount of power and fortitude. It's not an easy profession, and you can't go into it with a meek or a mild demeanor. It requires someone who isn't afraid to confront situations and who doesn't mind things being a little crazy on a daily basis.

How have you seen attitudes towards women chefs change over the course of your career?

Oh, quite a bit. Now, probably 30-percent of the chefs I know are women. I think the old-school way of thinking has really been overshadowed by a new breed of chefs—including a lot of women—who bring fresh energy, new ideas, and creativity to the table.

Chef Rosemary Ragone | When in Rome
What challenges did you face entering the industry?

When I interviewed people—line cooks and sous chefs and what have you—immediately,

they would be faced with the fact that a woman chef would be watching them every minute of the day. I could tell they weren't willing to take orders from a woman, but I think slowly, as they became aware of my capabilities, they began to respond. I've had the pleasure of working with some very creative young men right out of culinary school.

Do you think there is any overlap between the life of a homemaker and a professional chef?

Cooking at home and cooking in a restaurant line, different things come into play. We have access to ingredients from around the world without having to go to a specialty shop—we grow most of the produce for the restaurant in our garden, which is right next to the restaurant. Still, preparing a beautiful meal in a home kitchen is something anyone can do.

Chef Sarah Linkenheil | Sally's Restaurant at Manchester Grand Hyatt

As a woman, what challenges did you face entering the industry?

Having self-esteem and courage. Maybe women struggle with that in any job, to be assertive and, get respect from their co-workers. Whether the person is above you or below you, that respect has to be enforced.



Rosemary Ragone

What advantage, if any, do you think women have over men in this industry?

Women love to entertain. That's the advantage: women care for people, we want to make people comfortable.



Patricia Vega

Chef Patricia Vega | Hacienda de Vega
What image or memory do you think of when I say "women in the kitchen?"

For me, it's an image of family, and in Mexico, women are always in the kitchen, but never as chef. Theirs is a lower position, called the *mayora*. Really, she runs the kitchen, but they never give her the position of chef, which is reserved for men, even though she has the same obligations and responsibilities. Above all, in the family and at home, the woman's place is in the kitchen, as a mother and a wife taking care of everyone.

How have attitudes toward women changed?

They've changed a lot! There are so many more woman chefs, they're more accepted, and some are becoming very well known. Like in all other areas, women are showing that they are just as capable, if not more so, than men. I think it's gotten so much better!

What has been your greatest challenge as a woman in the restaurant industry?

To be respected and to balance my attitude. A lot of women have to act like men when they go to work outside the house. But I think we can be firm and feminine, too.

**For more women in the kitchen, see page 30*