One of Portugal’s great culinary figures. It was only in his senior year of his Business Communication degree that José Avillez decided to become a chef. Offering different culinary experiences, and expressing his enormous passion for cooking, his five restaurants in Lisbon and one in Oporto stands out due to his enterprising spirit and his willingness to go one step further.

Distinguished with two Michelin stars, Belcanto restaurant opened in 1958 in Chiado, at the São Carlos square, next to the São Carlos National Theatre and to the house where the great Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa was born. Its singular location in Lisbon historic centre, its graceful, sophisticated atmosphere, the discrete and attentive service, and the pleasures of its cuisine, soon won over Lisbon’s elite who turned Belcanto into the place to be seen. José Avillez’s Belcanto restaurant re-opened in the beginning of 2012, totally refurbished, and was awarded a Michelin star in that same year. In 2014, Belcanto restaurant received a second Michelin star, making Belcanto the first restaurant in Lisbon to be distinguished with two Michelin stars, and José Avillez the first Portuguese chef to obtain this honour in Portugal. At Belcanto, José Avillez offers a revisited Portuguese cuisine to an exclusive set of ten tables in a stylish ambience that makes us travel from the old romantic Chiado to the future. In a unique place, filled with details, where art and memories are present, José Avillez invites us on an incomparable gastronomic and sensory journey.
Cantinho do Avillez is an old wish of José Avillez… For a long time he dreamt of a restaurant like this, with a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, with a simple but sophisticated cuisine, which makes us want to return and return. Located in Lisbon and in Oporto, Cantinho do Avillez restaurant welcomes you with a natural blend of the traditional and the modern. Quality is the priority with Chef José Avillez, and so nothing is left to chance. The cuisine, largely Portuguese inspired, is nevertheless influenced by travels abroad.

José Avillez’s first gourmet bar ‘Mini Bar’ located in São Luiz Theatre, which offers a new entertainment concept. A drink menu consisting of small and varied gastronomic experiences full of flavour.

José Avillez adores Lisbon, especially Chiado. The idea of Café Lisboa arose from the wish to breathe new life into Largo de São Carlos by creating a comfortable venue with a terrace as a place for those who live in or visit the city to relax all week long.

Since young, José Avillez dreamed of opening a pizzeria… perhaps because his father owned one of the first pizzerias in Portugal, perhaps because he was fascinated by how pizza has travelled around the world, or perhaps because he adores the fun, family atmosphere of pizzerias, or perhaps because he loves the challenge and very probably for all these reasons.
In 2007 José Avillez’s JA at Home take-away service was created and together with José Bento dos Santos and the Quinta do Monte D’Oiro vineyard he launched JA wines, bearing his signature: JA Red, JA White and JA Rosé.

José Avillez has also contributed to countless Portuguese and foreign books and is the author of “Um Chef em Sua Casa” (“A Chef in Your Home”). The success of his first book led him to publish his second work “Petiscar com Estilo” (“Snacking in Style”) a year later. In 2013 he returned to writing with the bilingual (Portuguese and English) book “Cantinho do Avillez – As Receitas” (“Cantinho de Avillez – The Recipes”), which reveals some of the more popular recipes and most requested dishes served at his Cantinho do Avillez restaurant.

José Avillez authors and hosts TV and radio cooking shows. The highly successful programme “JA ao Lume” (“JA at the Stove”) broadcasted on SIC Mulher channel, which had 3 seasons. “Combinações Improváveis” (“Improbabilicious”) is José Avillez’s TV show, also on SIC Mulher channel. “O Chef sou eu” (“I’m the Chef”) is a recurring segment on Radio Comercial’s mornings, the most popular Portuguese radio station.
Diego Muñoz and José Avillez crossed their influences and prepared a unique four hands menu for lunch at Mini Bar on 19 April 2016. “It was extraordinary to cook with Diego. Peruvian cuisine has very interesting influences and ingredients. It was a great experience, not only for me but also for the whole team. It was an important learning moment,” explained José Avillez.

Diego Muñoz, the renowned Peruvian chef that has distinguished himself worldwide for his talent and creativity, was welcomed by José Avillez in Lisbon. Until the beginning of 2016, Diego Muñoz worked as Executive Chef of the famous restaurant Astrid y Gastón, at Casa Moreyra, in Lima, Peru. With him, Astrid y Gastón reached the #14 position in San Pellegrino’s list of 50 World’s Best Restaurants, and the #3 position in the Best Restaurants in Latin America. Last January, Diego Muñoz announced his departure from the restaurant to devote himself to a gastronomic journey around the world in order to expand his knowledge and prepare a new project.

Diego Muñoz adds “Cooking with José is something I have always looked forward to. I have heard so much about him and his restaurants that I had to come and see it. It is amazing all what he has done for the Portuguese gastronomy, he is a truly ambassador of his culture. We met at El Bulli in 2007, and then never lost the contact, so being finally here and working together in his city is just great. It was the best feeling when we arrive and he had prepared the entire kitchen brigade to help us for the event. Being received like that was a luxury for us and we can’t thank enough his amazing team！”
WG Magazine catches up with Chef José Avillez...

It’s interesting to learn how Chef’s find their passion for cooking. Chef José Avillez tells us about his formative years and how did he found his way into the culinary field to become the most sought-after Chef...

“From an early age, I had a love of cookery and food. As a child, I would spend three or four hours a day, after school, in the kitchen. Around the age of ten, my sister and I used to make cakes to sell to our family and friends. But it was only during the final year of studying Communication that I realised my heart belonged to the kitchen. I undertook several trips, training courses and traineeships as a chef, amongst others with Antoine Westermann at Fortaleza do Guincho, at Alain Ducasse’s school, in Eric Frechon’s kitchen at the Bristol Hotel, and at the renowned El Bulli, a step which really changed my career.”

Chef Avillez takes us back when he started his career...

“I had two amazing mentors that truly inspired me (and even today continue to do so): Maria de Lourdes Modesto, the most important Portuguese author on Traditional Portuguese Cuisine, and José Bento dos Santos the most important Portuguese gastronome. They shared their knowledge in a very generous way and were always very supportive, I’m very grateful to both. At Alain Ducasse school I learned the importance of mastering the basic techniques, knowing the produce, the suppliers, and seeking for perfection. At Bristol Hotel I learned about organization, precision and discipline. Ferran Adrià was the one who opened my mind, he taught me to look further. When I left El Bulli I knew I would never look at food the same way.”

“Over 500 years ago there lived people who revolutionised our knowledge of the world.

Driven by a desire to know and discover. Aware of the risks and the hardships. The Portuguese set out from Lisbon in search of all things new: new seas, new lands, new places, new peoples and new products.

Guided by knowledge and science, they created the first globalization phenomenon.

Lisbon offered the world a new outlook.

At Belcanto, inspired by the feats of the past, we have built the future, while respecting customs and traditions, sharing the same lure for the new and valuing teamwork and the interchange of experience and knowledge.

Together we have discovered new techniques, new concepts and new ways of serving.

The creation of a Portuguese haute cuisine, timeless, dateless.

The union, the creativity, the desire to evolve and go one step further.”

José Avillez

Photo © Paulo Barata
Chef Avillez’s cuisine is very creative, he reinterprets old-fashioned Portuguese dishes which are intense with flavors – we wanted to know how he brings about this balance on a plate…

It’s a challenge to combine tradition with modern ingredients and techniques and an innovative spirit. For me the goal is to enhance flavors and textures. I have written some commandments that define our kitchen and the first one is: Flavour is the most important. This means that technique serves the product (and not the other way around) and creation for itself is not praised, to do differently we have to do better. When I think about a dish I think about the flavors, the textures, the temperatures and the way it’s served. I pay so much attention to details that I even design several of the supports that serve as plates for my creations, which are then made by a potter or a carpenter.

Chef Avillez describes his cuisine…
I have a passion for food and cooking so I like to offer different styles of cooking. That’s why I have five different restaurants (Belcanto, Mini Bar, Cantinho do Avillez in Lisbon and in Oporto, Cafe Lisboa and Fazenda Lisboa) and a take-away store (JA em cada). No matter what the style of cooking, I always bet on quality and my goal is to give greater pleasure to people. If I had to name the style that really defines me as a chef I would choose Belcanto. At Belcanto I offer a new Portuguese haute cuisine. This is the style that truly reflects my evolution.

We asked Chef Avillez about his greatest influences in the kitchen…
Everything inspires and influences me (memories, travels, people…), but some of my main influences are: Portuguese cuisine, the sea, and some Portuguese landscapes.
Chef Avillez opinion on the best recipe that he has ever created and his inspiration for this recipe…

Maybe “Dip in the Sea”, a Belcanto sea bass dish with seaweed and shellfish. I grew in Cascais up surrounded by pinewoods and near the sea. The memory of being that close to the sea is very strong and is really a part of me, it defines me. But I also love the “Giant red shrimps from Algarve with Thai flavours” at Cantinho do Avillez, or even the “Pastel Lisboa”, one of the most wonderful minced beef pastries you will ever taste, at Café Lisboa. Those pastries take me back to my childhood. The “Algarve prawns in ceviche”, served on a lime slice with a beetroot sphere and fried corn topping and the “Tuna tartar temaki cone” with spicy soy, or the Hot and cold of escabeche cod” with raspberry vinaigrette, that I serve at Mini Bar are inspired in my great passion for fish.

Chef Avillez shares the process he goes through to create a new dish…

For me the act of creation is often a solitary and complex moment. It’s not easy to explain. It’s a mental process. It happens more often when I’m travelling or on vacations. The ideas start coming together in my mind. When I go back to the kitchen and share the idea with my team the new dish is usually 90% complete.
We asked Chef Avillez to tell us which new ingredients are inspiring him and what are his favourite ingredients he loves working with…

“Portuguese fish and shellfish. I believe we have the best fish and the best seafood in the world. The taste and texture are absolutely unique. Since we have a large coastline, we have lots of very fresh fish and seafood with an incredible quality.”

Ingredients are strictly chosen. We bet on high quality ingredients and we value seasonality and non-industrial production. Because we have several different restaurants we already use a very wide range of ingredients. I’m testing some new ingredients for ‘Bairro do Avillez’ my new project, but I can’t say more for now.

Chef Avillez loves to work with Portuguese fish and shellfish and there is not one ingredient that he was not able to master as it has never happened so far.

Special cooking equipment... I couldn’t live without a knife and I like sous-vide very much.

Chef Avillez speaks about his first book “Um Chef em sua casa” (A Chef in your home) - a book based on techniques through simple recipes with a perfect mix of quality produce and simplicity... “This was my first book. This book brings together some basic techniques and tips and has some of my favourite home meals. After ‘A Chef at your home’ I launched ‘Petiscar com estilo’ with a wide sort of snacks, ‘Cantinho do Avillez’, a bilingual (Portuguese and English) book with some of the most popular recipes from Cantinho do Avillez restaurant and this month I’m launching ‘Combinações Improváveis’ (Improbabilicious) also a bilingual (Portuguese and English) book with some of the best recipes from my TV Show.
Produce, Creativity or Technique - Chef Avillez creates a cohesive balance of all three on a plate… “For me flavour is the most important. This means that technique serves the product (and not the other way around) and I don’t make creation an end in itself. To do differently I must do better.”

José Avillez’s creative cuisine… José adds “Creativity requires perviousness and a deep desire for knowledge, both outside and within oneself. If the outer knowledge comes from undivided attention and actual insatiable interest for the world, for people, for history, for the present and for the future, the inner knowledge is based on a constant process of self-analysis and interrogation, meditation and reflection, on understanding and interpreting the outside world, giving meaning and identifying feelings, instincts, and emotions.

Knowledge and research boost creativity and tune up intuition. Creativity instigates freedom! The absence of prejudice and the ability of believing without ceasing to question are vital for developing creative thinking.

The cuisine expresses different moments of knowledge, learning and reflection, and expresses not only the evolution of technique but also the maturity, personality and soul of who creates it.

Creating is an act of freedom with infinite possibilities of expression. Inside the kitchen, ingredients, techniques, technology, recipes, elaborations, and concepts serve creativity, in a world of infinite possibilities. A dish can take us on a journey to places, landscapes, times and stories. It can make us laugh or cry. It can get us to actually know a certain food, intensifying its flavor and texture or it can reveal a completely new dimension of a food we thought we knew, using the technique, technology, and/or unprecedented combination of flavors, making us see further ahead and arising perceptions, intimacies, feelings and emotions.

Whenever we think and reflect, a double phenomenon of perception happens within us - at the same time we feel and acknowledge a certain frame of mind, we come across a random outer landscape that intersects our inner landscape. I see this intersection as the most accurate result of interpreting the seen and sensed reality.”
most beautiful cities, it filled with history, it is full of life, it has a rich culinary heritage and it has wonderful hosts. There is a thin line between my creative and entrepreneurial side. I’m always thinking about new projects. For me, new ideas generate energy and give me a strong willingness to go beyond the normal boundaries of possibility. So I’m already working on a new venue: ‘Bairro do Avillez’ (Avillez’ Neighbourhood). ‘Bairro do Avillez’ will consist of several restaurant concepts that will open gradually starting from June 2016. It will be a place filled with delicious details that will reflect the Lisbon experience, simultaneously typical and cosmopolitan.

Since being a chef is perceived as a glamorous profession, Chef Avilles gives his take on chefs who are first entering the field today…

Forget the glamour. You will need a lot of passion and hard work to succeed. Learn as much as you can, be grateful for every opportunity, be a good team member and never stop evolving.