

FOOD & WINE

The Timeless Advice Jacques Pépin Says Every Young Chef Should Know

The culinary legend celebrates his 90th birthday.

By [Merlyn Miller](#) | Published on December 18, 2025



Credit: Mark Kauffman / Getty Images

Today, Jacques Pépin turns 90 years old, and it would be an understatement to say that over the past nine decades, this French chef has left his mark on the culinary world.

Throughout his career, [Pépin](#) has written over 30 cookbooks, shown millions of viewers how to make French food at home through his shows, mentored generations of new chefs in the Culinary Arts Program at Boston University, and received 24 James Beard Awards, including the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award.

That's just a small sample of Pépin's achievements, but these are some standout moments worth celebrating on this milestone birthday. The chef's namesake nonprofit, the Jacques Pépin Foundation (JPF), has been celebrating the occasion for much longer than just a single day. Over the past year, the organization's 90/90 campaign has hosted 90 dinners across the country, not just to wish Pépin a happy birthday, but also to support his life's work.



Esteemed chefs, including Daniel Boulud, Maneet Chauhan, Wylie Dufresne, Stefano Secchi, Lee Anne Wong, and dozens more talented individuals, threw ticketed dinners for the 90/90 campaign. While the meals celebrated Pépin's birthday, they also had another goal: to raise funds for the JPF's ongoing efforts to provide free culinary skills training to people facing barriers to employment.

In addition to his love of food and cooking, Pépin has consistently demonstrated throughout his career that he's passionate about education. He's been a faculty member at Boston University for over 30 years and served as dean of special programs at the International Culinary Center (ICC) in New York City for the same length of time. In 2016, the French chef teamed up with his daughter and son-in-law to create the JPF, which has spent the subsequent decade making culinary education more accessible to a broader audience.

While speaking with Pépin about the 90/90 campaign, we were eager to learn what someone known for their mentorship, culinary prowess, and love of teaching is looking to impart to younger chefs in the industry.

Like many other culinary professionals, the *Julia and Jacques Cooking at Home* host learned to cook by apprenticing in kitchens at a young age. Reflecting on the process of learning to create delicious food, Pépin notes that “For a young chef, what you have to do is to work and conform wherever you go.”



When working in a restaurant under another chef, he explains that “You look at the food through the eye of that chef, and you look at taste through the taste buds of that chef, whether that coincides with your taste or not.

"You need to stay there for a year, a year and a half, or two years. You learn this way, and then you go to another chef, and then you go to another one, and then too many, and then eventually you learn a lot this way. Then you bring [that knowledge] together at some point, and you do your own stuff."

Pépin places great emphasis on seeing food through others' perspectives and learning from their skills, while maintaining an original point of view. He explains that, "Eventually you go out on your own and you put all that material, all that variety, together, and you filter it through your sense of taste, your sense of aesthetic, and now you're doing your own stuff."

While Pépin is an expert at classic French techniques, it's easy to see a unique point of view in his recipes, too. Dishes that focus on reducing food waste, like his favorite way to [repurpose stale bread](#), and recipes that evoke the flavors of his childhood, such as his mother's [Oeufs Jeannette](#), underscore a distinct culinary viewpoint honed over 90 years.