



Transcript (Edited/Derivative Version) for:

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH ALICE WATERS**

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at Chez Panisse  
Berkeley, California, USA

Interviewers:

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Total Interview Run Time | 47:56

Time	Comments
	<b>Chez Panisse: Philosophy</b>
02:27	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>                      We're in now, the forty-third year of the restaurant. And, I've always thought of the restaurant a little bit like a child that, that, you know, in the first five years you have to care for every minute, every minute of the day. And then, and then, it becomes a little more independent at sort of, from six until it becomes a teenager. And then there were some wild moments in there as a teenager. And then it became very much its own, um, around the twentieth year.</p>
03:05	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>                      And, it still-, it-, it's working into its adulthood right now and it's such a pleasure to see people engaged in it. It-, as if they were just opening the restaurant; they have that kind of enthusiasm about it. And, I-, I've made a big effort to keep that happening so, I do think of the restaurant as a family, my extended family. And want people to have ownership of it and feel like they can go away and that they can come back; we'll always take them in. And it's a beautiful thing that does happen. That people go away, and they go, ... some have even opened their own restaurants then they come back and they become mainstays here. And think of it, as if it is their own.</p>
04:13	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>                      And I-, I love that. I really do. I think that's what keeps the restaurant alive. That I'm still tasting all the time and, and bringing ideas back into the restaurant but, there's something, um that-, it's about the philosophy of it (background noise) that, that gives us a bigger purpose. So people aren't just working their jobs, for the-, for the dinner and every night and doing it that way, but I think we are really spreading the word about the philosophy of food. And this is not really a new philosophy of food, it's been around since the beginning of time; the beginning of civilization.</p>
05:06	<b>Alice Waters</b>

	<p>But very sadly our fast-food culture has completely buried it. And, so, when I went to France as a student at the University of California I visited a country that was kind of the Slow Food culture. And I fell in love with it. I went to the bakeries and fresh bread every day and there were two farmer’s markets and there was wonderful food in the school cafeteria—if you can imagine. And people even have a little glass of wine with lunch. I thought it was so civilized, students had priority at museums, in concerts and I got a really big picture of culture. And I wanted to live like that when I came back. And I know, knew food was part of it and I thought it was all of it. But really I brought back a lot of values with me. And I’ve never lost them, I’ve- I wanted this restaurant to be about that the-, the hospitality. I wanted it to be about real food; about something that tasted delicious.</p>
<p><b>Preparation and Presentation</b></p>	
<p>06:49 [continued]</p>	<p><b>Alice Waters</b> And so, I’m really trying to bring people back to their senses, if you will. To smell things, to taste things, to listen, to see and that’s-, that’s really part of, I think a big philosophy of teaching that-, that of Maria Montessori that I digested when I took the classes to become a teacher in England.</p>
<p>08:30</p>	<p><b>Alice Waters</b> ... I thought when I left the Montessori School to open Chez Panisse I really thought that that was closing a chapter of my life. But the ideas of Montessori have-, are deeply implanted, and I’ve used them to create the restaurant really. When she talked about the prepared classroom where you would arrange things so the children would be excited about working with them, and how you put flowers in rooms, thing that were beautiful, all the equipment was kept in really good shape, everything was painted all the time, it was a very important part—the maintenance. And I immediately saw this restaurant in that way. And, no job was too small. I wanted as soon as you walked in the door, I wanted it to smell good. You know, I wanted, and if it</p>

	<p>doesn't smell good enough I burn rosemary and carry it around the restaurant to make it feel like it's about food. Subconsciously I want people to be engaged in that way.</p>
10:18	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>          ... It's about paying attention. And so it's, you're looking to the flowers and you want them to be alive because they represent what's happening in the kitchen. And so, we're changing them seasonally so that you're feeling like you're in the spring in Berkeley, and that you could only be here in the spring because this is what you can eat now. This is what's growing right now in Berkeley. And we only buy food that's in season. And grown by people who really are taking care of the land for all of us.</p>
<p><b>Advocate for Education</b></p>	
11:13	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>          Well, I had a friend who was a Montessori teacher, and she said, "You know, you should come and see the classroom, watch how we teach children math." I had never been very good at math, and they had all of these little beads that you moved back and forth. They had little logs that represented, you know, certain lengths, and you'd put them together. As you move these pieces, you found the answer to the problem.</p>
11:50	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>          And I- I was really impressed with it. I've always, sort of, I think learned that way by doing, and even, even from my third grade class, where we studied dinosaurs, and birds, and very much about nature.</p>
12:14	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>          And my teacher wanted us to carve the birds that we saw, she and her husband did it out of driftwood. And I was so impressed with her; and in fact, I still have one that she carved, and it made a big, big impression. I can remember all the names of the dinosaurs and the birds because I had actually made models out of clay. And I- I know that that has helped me kind of all my life.</p>
13:08	<p><b>Alice Waters</b></p>

	... I think that that is what opens your mind, opens your senses, and your senses are your pathways into your mind. And that is what happens with food in every, every dimension. I mean, it's- it's helping you fine tune those pathways.
14:01	<b>Alice Waters</b> ... [W]hen you're really educating children to be part of the marketplace, you're not educating them to be creative individuals. You're really teaching them that money is a goal out there and that yes, this learning that's happening is going to give you that degree that's going to be able to give you more money, and I think that there's a huge amount of pressure on children and in fact that really, a fast-food culture has kind of taken over our school system, and we aren't learning what we really need to be learning to survive with each other on this planet. And that's why I really have become involved with public education.
<b>Working with Friends</b>	
15:38	<b>Alice Waters</b> ... I- I really wanted to work with my friends, and so I hired them. And people say, "Don't do that!"
15:50	<b>Alice Waters</b> But in fact, if you're working all the time, you really want to be with people you like, you have things in common with.
16:00	<b>Alice Waters</b> And my group of friends and the people we hired, many of them had not ever been cooking professionally. I'm not sure that we had anybody who was cooking except- we had one waiter who was a professional waiter.
16:16	<b>Alice Waters</b> But really, everybody came from different backgrounds, and many of them were artists in another part of their lives, and they would do waiting on tables as a second job. And the people in the kitchen, a lot of them you know, were, had been travelling around the world, bringing back ideas about French cooking, or what was happening in England, or what was happening in Asia.
16:52	<b>Alice Waters</b>

	They made a contribution to what became a kind of big picture of what Chez Panisse cooking was about.
	<b>Focus on Tasty Food</b>
17:06	<b>Alice Waters</b> There was never a business plan at the beginning. In fact, I really believe that, that what made us successful was the fact that we were never thinking about making money.
17:24	<b>Alice Waters</b> I thought we would. I mean, I never doubted that we would be able to make money, but the most important thing for me was taste, and I was determined to have something that was delicious; and if I could get it to the person in the dining room, then that person would come back again. That was it. They would be won over.
18:20	<b>Alice Waters</b> I-, I think when some of the national, restaurateurs came to Chez Panisse. I know when James Beard came in the earlier days—it must've been about year two or year three – he came with Marion Cunningham, a very well-known chef herself. And they always thought that the restaurant was a wonderful experiment in home cooking. They didn't even think of it as a restaurant. They didn't recognize it; they thought they were in somebody's home, and I love that.
19:05	<b>Alice Waters</b> And uh, and I'll never forget when Craig Claiborne came because he came right into the kitchen with his typewriter on the counter, and I was grilling something, and he said, "Just tell me what you're doing," and he was typing, typing it up.
19:22	<b>Alice Waters</b> I-, I knew that there was something going on here that was irregular, and-, and because we only had one menu. We only had one menu.
19:39	<b>Alice Waters</b> And, so, every night, we had to make that menu really tasty, because there wasn't any alternative, and so we were pushed more quickly probably than a lot of other places to find ingredients that were different and tasty.

20:00	<b>Alice Waters</b> And that- and that moved us into the ten years – the first ten years.
	<b>Around the Table</b>
20:40	<b>Alice Waters</b> That's always- Printing has always been a very important part of Chez Panisse because I was involved with Letter Press printers before Chez Panisse opened, and the first menus were printed by David Goines who-, terribly good friend.
20:59	<b>Alice Waters</b> And we always have cared about printing special menus. Every kind of printing that we do, we're looking to the typeface, what kind of paper it's on.
21:12	<b>Alice Waters</b> Again, it's in that place of-, of- no thing is too small, or we want to do it as well as we can do it. And, I also had a very, very important friend who was in the film business, and he has brought many, many filmmakers to this restaurant who have gone around the world and brought their friends to this restaurant. And that has kept a kind of conversation going on here.
21:49	<b>Alice Waters</b> And I can never underestimate the proximity to the University of California, which has been an endless source of brilliant, young people coming here to work as bussers or helpers in the kitchen for the four years they're at Cal, and then going away with a kind of knowledge about food, and then some of them coming back, and working here.
22:22	<b>Alice Waters</b> So, this-, this has been both in terms of the spirit of the groups that works in the restaurant, but it's been very important for the life in the dining room because we'll have the whole class of journalism students come with Michael Pollan, or we may have- we used to have Orville Schell, who was the head of-, head of-, dean of the department bringing his guests from around the world. I mean, he brought the Dalai Lama here, which was one of the great moments of, in the life of the restaurant

	because we have two very important – probably three we have had – communities of people.
23:14	<b>Alice Waters</b> We've had an Afghani- uh, a group; we've had a Vietnamese group, and we've had a Tibetan group that have been involved in all different positions in the restaurant, and several people have been here really for twenty years, twenty-five years, so you can imagine when Dalai Lama came.
	<b>Small Restaurant Movement</b>
24:08	<b>Alice Waters</b> ... I mean, it began with people having one restaurant then wanting to have five, or ten, or fifteen restaurants, sort of the chain that began in an artisan way, then just became a money-making operation.
24:51	<b>Alice Waters</b> But something else has been happening in the last five years—and I think it's the healthiest thing imaginable—is that people want to be in the restaurant business as a way of life; they want to have their family as part of it; they want to, and-
25:08	<b>Alice Waters</b> and their way of life is very much in a communal way. They're working with their friends. It reminds me very much of the beginnings of Chez Panisse, that you're doing a project with your friends, and you, it's not going to go beyond this place, but it will make a living for everybody who's involved.
	<b>Food Stunt</b>
25:44	<b>Alice Waters</b> I did cook Werner Herzog's shoe one time, not that it was edible. He did eat some.
25:52	<b>Alice Waters</b> But that was kind of a wonderful little, amusing experiment that got filmed by Les Blank, and has become kind of a cult mus-, little video around the world, which I find completely charming. It's so unlike, it's certainly unlike me to cook a shoe.
26:21	<b>Alice Waters</b>



	I tried to cook it like a confit of duck but no matter how much fat you add in there, it didn't soften up the leather.
	<b>Uncompromising</b>
27:02	<b>Alice Waters</b> ... I knew one thing: that I wanted a restaurant that tasted like the little restaurant I had been in in France. I wanted that place, and it was very deliberate.
27:16	<b>Alice Waters</b> I wanted chairs like the French chairs; I wanted flowers on the table like that; I wanted all of those things that I remembered from France. But France, was at that time, a Slow Food culture, so it's just by good luck that we created the environment that led us into a way of thinking that-, that I think allowed us to be creative in what we were doing and it sort of empowered us to do that, and I was uncompromising.
28:02	<b>Alice Waters</b> Again, something from the French: they didn't, they never thought that they were compromised. I mean, we would go out to dinner, and we had to look at every restaurant menu, "No, that's not good enough; that's not fresh enough; they had that last night on the menu. We can't go there." All of this and it was about discernment, and I just became naturally discerning. And again, I was just unwilling to compromise, and I think that that in and of itself has again, pushed us.
	<b>Passion</b>
28:40	<b>Alice Waters</b> I have always thought also that, that if it wasn't something that I really liked to do that we could stop and we could do something else, so I never thought in terms of a career. Again, I think that that's very sort of fast-food culture thinking – you're going to have a career, and you're going to have these segments of your life cut out, and you're going to be this when you're fifty.
29:12	<b>Alice Waters</b> It's very confining, and I was part of the counterculture of this country, and I didn't want to have anything to do

	with that. I couldn't even buy insurance for the restaurant! Thank God my father was an insurance man in his past, and he made me buy business interruption insurance so when we had a fire the first time, we survived because of that, then I've been buying it since.
29:46	<b>Alice Waters</b> (laughter) Uh, it was just against my nature, so we never thought of it being, you know, lasting longer than a year, and then we'd reevaluate, "Do we want to go another year?"
30:00	<b>Alice Waters</b> And so, the birthday I said to myself, "Is this something that I'm really passionate about?" And for forty-three years, I guess I've decided I'm still passionate.
30:15	<b>Alice Waters</b> But I'm passionate about it because it's-, it's ever-evolving. It's like the learning about vegetables; I mean, at first, maybe we had ten that we used all the time. We must have a hundred and ten.
30:33	<b>Alice Waters</b> I mean, the variations, I mean, maybe, we have five hundred and ten. It's just never ending what you can find from nature, how you're cooking differently, how it's challenging, completely challenging to me.
	<b>Local and Organic</b>
31:23	<b>Alice Waters</b> Going back to the, the beginning of the restaurant, people have asked me, you know, "How did you find all of these organic ranchers and farmers to build this network that you have?"
31:38	<b>Alice Waters</b> At the beginning, I just said I wasn't looking for organic farmers; I wasn't doing that. I was looking for tastes, but that led me to the local, organic farmers. And I just sort of fell in love with what they were providing us with, and I was willing to pay them anything for their produce, and so we built this beautiful relationship together.
32:14	<b>Alice Waters</b> And it- it began with a kind of network of farmers. We had many, many, many, that we would buy from at

	<p>different times in the season so when you're getting peaches, you sort of got the first ones from the valley, and then you'd go up in the foothills to get the next ones, and we learned about all the little microclimates.</p>
32:40	<p><b>Alice Waters</b> But about twenty years into the restaurant, my parents said, you know, "Wouldn't you like to have a farm of your own? You know, really find somebody who would really grow it exactly the way you want it and you could take your compost back to the farm, and you could really have a relationship."</p>
33:07	<p><b>Alice Waters</b> And I said, "Well, if you can find somebody, we'd love that." They went to Davis, to the University, asked for all the organic farmers within one hour of Chez Panisse.</p>
33:20	<p><b>Alice Waters</b> And they went, and they visited. And they came back, and they said, "We have five people, but we really only have one." And that was Bob Cannard and that was almost, well, almost thirty years ago.</p>
33:40	<p><b>Alice Waters</b> And the first five years of working with them were a little tough; I think he would say that too, but we have such a great up and forth, and basically, he tells us what he has, and we cook what he has.</p>
33:56	<p><b>Alice Waters</b> At first, it was our giving him seeds and saying, "Would you plant these and pick them like this, and do this like that," and then, and now, he tells us. And it's made the restaurant so much, I don't know. I would say more grounded deeply because we, we were all going up to the farm and walking with Bob, listening to his philosophy, which is very much about letting things grow naturally, with all the crops that he has are harmonious with nature around them.</p>
34:52	<p><b>Alice Waters</b> So, he's allowing the bugs, and the bees, and all of that to provide the very healthy soil which is growing these vegetables.</p>
35:07	<p><b>Alice Waters</b> So, when he used to tell me that they're ten times more nutritious than anybody else's vegetables, I didn't</p>

	believe him. And, now, I believe him; I really do. It's the-, it's the earth around that-, that has all of the sort of chemical goodness that allows the vegetables to grow.
36:13	<b>Alice Waters</b> But there are many people that have contributed to this, this big picture I have of the land, and I can't think of anything more important than the preservation of the land. Nothing is more important than that; it's sort of land first.
36:35	<b>Alice Waters</b> And what-, what I do at the restaurant is support the people who are taking care of the land in that way, who really think about its-, its health, its fertility, the preservation of it. I can't think of anything more important.
<b>Farmers and Schools</b>	
37:22	<b>Alice Waters</b> Well, I think a lot of people learn from me, about the deliciousness of the food. I can't tell you how inspiring it is for me to see forty varieties of tomatoes in season, every little shape, and color, and size, and the whole biodiversity of that really inspires my cooking, and I'm completely dependent on those farmers. And so, I'm always talking about how precious they are, how important they are, how they need to be the heroes of this country, lifted up with the teachers and the farmers together.
38:09	<b>Alice Waters</b> And I guess, I really-, the idea of public education supporting farmers is the priority for me right now, that if, in fact, there could be a criteria for buying the food in schools, which says that we must purchase from local, sustainable farmers and ranchers, that it could change farming overnight in America; and so I am really fixated on that.
38:54	<b>Alice Waters</b> I'm not just wanting to upgrade food in schools, because that won't do it. There's either real food that comes from the earth that's being taken care of, or there's

	another kind of food; and I think it's what's causing our-, our poor health in this country and many, many, many, many other problems that we're having.
39:22	<b>Alice Waters</b> Uh and so I-, I really am wildly enthusiastic about the universality of this idea and the global possibilities of this idea that if philanthropists gave money to schools, and schools supported farmers, and farmers brought their values into the schools, I think we could make dramatic changes across the world.
	<b>The Edible Schoolyard</b>
40:18	<b>Alice Waters</b> The Edible Schoolyard project is an idea for a curriculum that uses the garden and a kitchen classroom as labs for teaching all subjects, all academic subjects at the school with the idea that cooking and gardening are things we all need to learn how to do for, again, we're thinking about the survival of all of us on this planet, and we all need to know what it takes to farm and what it takes to cook.
41:02	<b>Alice Waters</b> I mean, these are- eating is certainly- are universal activity. Every, I mean, if we're lucky.
41:14	<b>Alice Waters</b> So, the Edible Schoolyard I think is something that could begin in Kindergarten and go all the way through the education system, and the center piece of it all would be the cafeteria, which is a place where students can gather and eat together.
41:38	<b>Alice Waters</b> Now, I think there needs to be the criteria for the buying food from local, sustainable farmers that bring real food into the schools, and I think all children should eat at school for free and together so that school lunch, in a way, would become part of academia, that it wouldn't be a fast-food concession outside of the school and outside of the values of the school. It would be within the school. And I think children need to feel how much we care about them, and feeding children, and bringing them into a beautiful garden, and allowing them to be empowered to cook and make choices about

	<p>what they eat is something that-, that makes them feel so good, you know? It makes them feel like, like we really want them to succeed.</p>
	<p><b>Advice</b></p>
43:01	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>                  ... I think it's very important to be open to all kinds of experiences when you're young and-, and not to just to become—uh, I don't know how to say this well – I know what I want to teach a mentee, (laughter) a mentee, is that what it, a protégé. A protégé.</p>
43:50	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>                  As a protégé, I was really looking to certain people to tell me what was most important about the work that they did, and I was lucky to have amazing mentors in my life.</p>
44:10	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>                  But I never thought I knew very much, and I really needed them to help me along and to give me their best advice. And, in doing that, I kind of adopted their principles, and that's what has allowed me to-, to do the work I've done at the restaurant and in the schools.</p>
44:42	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>                  But I think that's how learning happens I think most successfully, is when you become an intern; you go into a place, and you work side-by-side with somebody. That's the way that, that we've learned again, since the beginning of time, apprenticing ourselves to people who are specialists, and they give-, gave their knowledge to us. And we have a very big internship program going on at the restaurant right now, and I think it works both ways.</p>
45:25	<p><b>Alice Waters</b>                  The intern is getting a lot, but we have people from all around the world who bring a lot to us, not only their-, their offering of their time, but they bring ideas to the restaurant that we would have not imagined, and-, and we end up cooking dishes from Ireland because they came from Ireland; it's very-, it's been great in that way -- very open.</p>
	<p><b>Mint Tea</b></p>

Alice Waters Oral History Transcript (Edited/Derivative Version)

46:07	<b>Alice Waters</b> How do I make mint tea? How do I make it?
46:11	<b>Alice Waters</b> It's a very hard recipe. (laughter) You have to have mint – fresh mint – and maybe you can get your fresh mint at the farmer's market, or maybe you have it growing in your own backyard.
46:27	<b>Alice Waters</b> But I go clip some fresh mint; I boil some water in the pot; I put the mint in a glass or I put it in a teapot, and when the water's boiling, I pour it in, and then I let it sit for three minutes or four, and that's it.
	<b>END</b>