

# The Google Chef tells all

An interview with Chef Charlie Ayers



## 1. Tell us a bit about yourself...

I was born in Chicago in 1966 and then later we moved to Southern California, a couple years later we moved to the eastern seaboard of the United States, which included Florida and New York we lived mostly in New York City and eventually moved to the suburbs of New Jersey until I left for college. My father was an officer in the United States Navy, which explained why we moved so much, have base will travel, that sort of thing. After graduating High School, I attended a culinary school in Providence Rhode Island, called

Johnson & Wales University. I received two degrees whilst attending, one in Culinary Arts the other in Food Service Restaurant Management.

## 2. When did you know you were going to become a chef and what inspired you?

My very first job was washing dishes in a diner on a busy highway in New Jersey. At the time I wasn't planning on becoming a Chef, I wanted to be an artist. As I moved up in the ranks in the kitchen at the diner, I soon realized I really enjoyed the creative outlet that food allowed for me. While still working at the diner I was given a break by a Chef at the Meadowland Hilton Hotel, in Secaucus New Jersey, just outside of New York City. I broke my chops in working at the coffee shop and as the late night room service cook on the weekends. I then knew at that time I wanted to be a chef. Eventually I did leave The Hilton, after working there for 4 years, I was tired of being passed by for promotion at the hotel because I didn't have a culinary degree. The Executive Chef suggested I go to school and come back to work for the corporation. I had bigger plans than that!

## 3. What was the hardest job you ever had?

I worked as a sous chef at a place called the 4th Street Grill in Berkeley, California. The chef there was a real piece of work. I couldn't stand the guy. I would experience this huge stabbing pain in my neck whenever I heard his voice. When he wasn't around the kitchen ran smoothly and beautiful. When he was, it was disaster and chaos almost nightly. I never understood how he kept his job. I really learned a great deal from him, I learned how not to treat my sous chef and cooks. I learned if I wanted to be a great chef I would have to learn how to accept help and understand that I don't know everything and everyone can teach you something. Some of my best Latin influenced dishes came from the Mexican dishwashers and prep cooks at that restaurant.

## 4. What's your greatest achievement and why?

Trying out for the Chefs Position for Google.Com, I beat out 25 other chefs for the job! My foods were the cleanest in flavors, most approachable and creative. I started with the company when there were only 50 employees and grew the operation to 5 thousand, 6 and a half years later, serving well over 5 thousand meals a day! My kitchen team grew from 4 cooks and 1 sous chef and two dishwashers to 150 cooks, five sous chefs, 75 dishwasher/ prep cooks.

I gained international recognition for the cuisine we provided to the

Google population. It was and still is the hardest place to try and get a reservation at in the Silicon Valley. You couldn't! You had to be invited by someone who worked there! I pushed the envelope every chance I had. I hired all of the musical acts and entertainment for the company. I planned all the outrageous parties and ski trips as well as help to mould the company's culture into becoming one of the hippest and coolest places to work at on the planet.

### 5. What are your top tips for healthy eating?

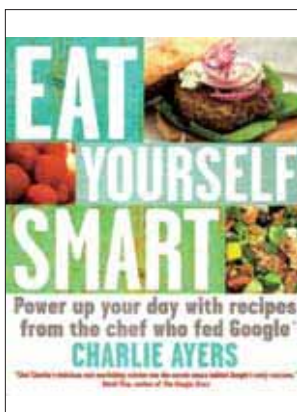
Avoid eating anything that has ingredients you cannot pronounce. If at all possible grow or buy and eat organic produce as much as you can. Avoid buying meats, poultry and fish which are not raised humanely or injected with growth hormones or fed an unnatural diet. Always buy wild fish and seafood.

I recommend eating five small meals a day. I also recommend incorporating raw foods and fermented foods into your daily diet as well.

### 6. What's your favourite dish and why?

That's a tough one. I have so many favorite dishes. I would have to say my favorite dishes for me are from the cook book, which by the way just came out in May 2008 in the States is called Food 2.0, while everywhere else in the world is called "Eat Yourself Smart".

One is a dish inspired from the Mediterranean called Fattoush, another dish which is influenced by the Italians called Tuna Carpaccio, I just really love the super clean taste of the fresh Ahi tuna and the last would be slightly sweet bread designed for the morning meal or afternoon tea. It's orange Cranberry bread.



## Cranberry-Orange Bread



- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Makes 1 loaf / Prep time: 15 minutes                | 1/2 tsp baking soda            |
| Cook time : 1 1/4 hours                             | 1/2 tsp fine sea salt          |
| 2 cups fresh or thawed frozen cranberries           | Finely grated zest of 1 orange |
| 1/2 cup unrefined granulated sugar                  | Juice of 3 oranges             |
| 2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour                 | 1/3 cup vegetable oil          |
| 1/2 cup whole wheat flour                           | 1 egg                          |
| 1/2 cup unrefined light brown sugar, lightly packed | 1 tsp natural vanilla extract  |
| 2 tsp baking powder                                 | A little milk                  |

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Lightly oil a standard 9in by 5in (23 by 12cm) metal loaf pan. Dust the pan with flour and tap out the excess.

Mix the cranberries and granulated sugar together in a small bowl. Set aside. In a separate bowl, mix the flours, brown sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Set aside.

Whisk together the orange zest, juice, oil, egg and vanilla extract. Add to the flour mixture and stir just until the ingredients are barely combined. Fold in the sugared cranberries. Add a little milk, if needed, to make a soft consistency that will drop from the spoon when it is gently shaken. Transfer the batter to the prepared pan and level the surface.

Bake until well risen, golden and firm to the touch, about 1 1/4 hours. A toothpick inserted in the center should come out clean. Let cool until just warm, then run a knife around the inside of the pan and unmold the loaf onto a wire rack to cool completely. Serve sliced and buttered.

Photo and recipe reprinted with kind permission from DK (Dorling Kindersley Limited), Noel Murphy and Chef Charlie Ayers. "Eat Yourself Smart" is available from local bookstores and online. Visit Charlie's website for more info [www.chefcharlieayers.com](http://www.chefcharlieayers.com)

## Whats for dinner tonight?



One of the new features of the ExpatWoman.com re-launch, is a facility to share recipes...they are always a hot topic on our information board! Under the new section, recipes are simply loaded and the database can be searched on any criteria... 'I have eggs, cheese and an onion in the fridge, what can I make...?' Share your cordon bleu masterpieces- but we are just as interested in those ideas that are quick and easy. Tell us about your local dishes too! Every month, we will have Dinner for Two to give away- it'll be a free draw from everyone who has posted a recipe, so tell us about your favourites today!

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