

THE REAL CORDON BLEU

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PAULA KANE, JULY 2010



Cook with Le Cordon Bleu, Paris (Photo credit: ©Le Cordon Bleu)

Paris. The very thought conjures visions.

Exquisite pastries enjoyed with steaming espresso; fashionably dressed women and grand boulevards. The City of Light and the city of love - it is perfection. However, the reality of [Paris](#) might be slightly different should you find yourself studying cuisine at [Le Cordon Bleu](#), the intensive program, in the oppressive heat of summer.

Studying at the world's most famous cookery school is an extremely romantic notion, a dream come true for any self-proclaimed foodie.

learn from.

Therefore, in order to impart any practical information on others, an official education seemed required, along with a fancy piece of paper to prove it. Le Cordon Bleu (LCB) in Paris appeared to be the perfect fit.

An expensive proposition

When pondering an opportunity such as this, there are a number of issues to take into consideration. This is an incredibly expensive proposition; the tuition is scandalous, as is the cost of living in Paris. However, is the experience of living in Paris worth it? A fine question to be sure. If the answer is no, move along. How do you envision spending your time in Paris? The intensive program at LCB involves ten to twelve hours at school each day, sometimes six days a week affording precious little time for anything else before collapsing, exhausted, into bed each night. You can forget about people watching at bistros in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, gazing upon the masters' work at [the Louvre](#), or shopping for shoes. However, if your time abroad is limited, the intensive course is just the ticket.

It was the foundation of my business plan. The goal: to obtain the skills and knowledge necessary to teach others to love and respect the food they eat, instructed in the setting of a private cooking school. Having long admired the French for their intense reverence and innate appreciation of food-a trait unimaginable to many North Americans - I could think of no better culture to



Chefs of Le Courdon Bleu, Paris plating a mouthwatering dish

For those who've never held a knife or made stock, the classes may prove daunting. If you've watched every episode of [Top Chef](#) and can make soufflés in your sleep, you may find yourself at the head of the class, as the Basic Cuisine course is true to title. On tap for this five-week sojourn are traditional French techniques and dishes. A typical day begins in the diminutive change room. Elbows and aprons (and occasionally knives) fly, as you race to don your LCB uniform. Before stepping foot into the kitchen you must attend the classroom demonstration. The recipe you are about to prepare—a mere three hours hence—is demonstrated to you by one of the chefs while you furiously take notes. Once complete, a sample of the dish is on offer to help you gauge the flavour, seasoning and presentation. After some serious gastronomic analysis, you dash over to the kitchen, set up your station, and in two and a half hours recreate the dish. Technique and complexity increase as the weeks march on, beginning with a simple soup and continuing through sauces, pastry, meats, poultry and fish. Having the ability to manage your time and to work in an efficient manner is highly beneficial, and will serve you well. No dawdling allowed.

Food is subjective

While stressful and challenging, with rarely a moment to breathe, the program is neither difficult nor demoralizing. And forget about all those horrifying, screaming chefs you've heard of. LCB chefs are quite docile, somewhat supportive, with neither a plate of food thrown nor profanities hurled. You are more likely to hear comments such as "c'est bon, parfait" and gentle suggestions like "peut-être, un peu de sel". Hardly the mean streets, not much of a thick skin is required. Yet as with art, food is subjective, and a healthy ability to overlook any sour comment is a necessary skill set. Nothing in life is perfect, including the dish you've just created, so relax, try not to cry and get on with it. As the French would say "C'est la vie, n'est pas?"

So what's the final verdict? In the end, Paris is still lovely, Le Cordon Bleu is a romantic idea, and with a few good techniques and recipes in my pocket, I walked away nary a regret in sight.

Still with little time for shoe shopping, Paula Kane is currently dividing her time between [France](#) and Canada, building her private cooking school in [Provence](#). For more information on à Table en Provence, visit www.atableprovence.com.