

THE DISH

Taiwan's Finest

Lanshu Chen, the fearless female chef behind Taiwan's top restaurant, speaks with **Diana Hubbell** about her culinary influences and where to eat in Taichung.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Lanshu Chen; a tea cup of goose foie gras served with coffee, lemon and marsala at Le Moût; mussels, clams and pork belly at Fore Restaurant.



"IN CHINESE CULINARY CULTURE, there is a sixth flavor, which is really more of a sensation," says Lanshu Chen, who oversees the kitchen at **Le Moût** (lemout.com; *tasting menus from NT\$3,500*), a high-wire fusion of French and Taiwanese cuisines in Taichung. "For example, ginger and cinnamon leave a warm sensation, a slight heat if you like, at the back of your palate."

That also might be an artful way to describe the treat of eating her cooking. Her avant-garde plates have garnered a string of accolades from international critics. "I use the word *jong* (balance) to describe my style, because my cuisine is a search for a harmony of tastes and textures."

It's also a consonance of the wisdom imparted by maternal mentors and the world-famous chefs she has worked under. Growing up in the northern Taiwanese village of Yilan, Chen's first teachers were her

mother and grandmother, who schooled her on the subtleties of traditional Chinese philosophy, and its interplay with food culture. She studied at both Le Cordon Bleu and École Grégoire-Ferrandi in Paris, then proved herself in the kitchens of some of the biggest names in the business: Patrick Pignol, Jean-François Piège, Jérôme Chaucesse and Thomas Keller. Yet as much as she admired these icons, her roots drew her back to her native land.

Chen is a fierce advocate of Taichung's dining scene. A recent favorite is **Fore Restaurant** (fb.com/forerestaurant2015; *dinner for two NT\$2,000*), a slick grill house serving hulking wagyu rib-eyes and Australian lamb chops with a side of vanilla-infused creamed corn or a 65°C egg with truffled mushrooms. She's also excited about **Hero Restaurant** (fb.com/herorestaurant.tw), an iconic farm-to-table eatery,

relocating to Taichung this month. "It was originally located up in Nanto mountain area," she says. "The chef planted his own vegetables and flowers."

Though her own dishes—think goose foie gras layered in a tea cup with marsala caramel, marsala espuma and coffee powder garnished with a whisper-thin lemon chip—might at first glance appear to be textbook nouvelle cuisine, their francophile leanings are underpinned by Chinese sensibilities. Her balanced creations have earned her the respect of fine dining peers, not to mention a growing list of titles, including best female chef in Asia, elevating her restaurant to a top-ranking this year in Taiwan.

"Passion, intuition and a sense of aesthetics are key to becoming a good chef," she says. That, and a little grandmotherly wisdom. ☺