



Choux Questionnaire: Greg de St. Maurice

A riff on [the well-riffed Proust Questionnaire](#), the CFS Choux Questionnaire is meant to elicit a tasty and perhaps surprising experience, framed within a seemingly humble exterior. (And yes, some questions have a bit more *craquelin* than others.) Straightforward on their own, the queries combined start to form a celebratory pyramid of extravagance. How that composite croquembouche is assembled and taken apart, however, is up to the respondents and readers to determine. Respondents are invited to answer as many questions as they choose.

The final question posed— *What question would you add to this questionnaire?*—prompts each respondent to incorporate their own inquisitive biome into the mix, feeding a forever renewed starter culture for future participants. For this edition, our respondent has replied to a question from Lisa Heldke (CFS Vol. 10 #2).

Our Choux Questionnaire respondent for this issue is [Greg de St. Maurice](#), an Associate Professor in Keio University's Faculty of Business and Commerce. He holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology (University of Pittsburgh) and Master's degrees from Oxford University, Ritsumeikan University, and American University. He served as the Vice President of ASFS from 2017 to 2022

What is your idea of a perfect food?

I recently came back across that dietary advice to eat the same “healthy” foods you like (oatmeal with blueberries, protein shakes, etc.) every day to make it easy to maintain a healthy diet. So when you ask this question I immediately think about how, for me, good foods go beyond providing nutrition and tasting good, as important as those two things are. They have to be grounded in a place, a time, a culture. They have to have

a story and meaning. Even better, stories and meanings. And, yeah, I can't eat the same thing every day.

Of what food or food context are you afraid?

I'm afraid that we're losing agrobiodiversity that could help us maintain sustainable food systems in the face of climate change. I'm also afraid of eating squishy bugs, but that's different.

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What word or concept describes an admirable food system?

Empathy. Also diversity. Is two cheating?

What word or concept prevents many food systems from becoming admirable?

Short-term profits.

Which food person do you most admire?

I admire the people who make World Central Kitchen's work happen. What they've accomplished is astounding. I also wish more people knew about Labour Protection Network, which is actively trying to eliminate human trafficking and forced labour in the Southeast Asian fishing industry.

Which food innovation do try to ignore?

You know how food companies will add nutrients to junk food and make sure they tell you about it in big letters on the label? I'm pretty successful at ignoring those labels—if I'm going to eat junk food, I'll buy it for the taste, not because I'm telling myself that it's a "healthy" food.

What is your greatest gastronomic extravagance?

The past few summers I've splurged on Okinawan mangoes. They're so good, but cheap they are not! I've also been making cocktails at home and buying different ingredients feels extravagant.

What is your current state of hunger?

Non-hunger. I'm preparing dinner (lemon-and-sage braised chicken, also asparagus) and I'll be hungry by the time it's ready.

What do you consider to be the most overrated food or food context?

Expensive restaurants and famous restaurants. And conversely, cheap food.

On what occasion do you feign satiety?

I'm more likely to feign not being hungry when I haven't eaten. Like during the last part of a long meeting when all I can think of is what I'm going to eat when it's over.

What do you most dislike about dinner tables?

The rules, the formality, the manners. I'm more of a kitchen table kind of guy for sure.

What is the quality you most like in a fruit?

I love it when a fruit has both acidity and sweetness. Passion fruit, currants, and citrus fruits are among my favourites.

What is the quality you most like in a cut of meat?

For me it's about a combination of flavour and texture. I was thinking about this recently because wagyu has this marbling of fat that makes it so tender you could practically eat it with a straw.

And when I went to Montana for the ASFS/AFHVS conference in 2010 I had a steak made from local grass-fed beef that was firm and juicy. I appreciate both.

Which condiments do you most overuse?

Grated cheese—as long as I don't have to grate it.

What kinds of gardens make you happiest?

Delicious, colourful, sustainable gardens. I dream of having a garden bigger than the approximation of a garden I have on my balcony right now—though the hibiscus, cilantro, and basil do bring me joy.

Which culinary skill would you most like to have?

I want to learn how to process and cook whole fish. When I was in my Ph.D. program my advisor, Rich Scaglion, would gift me quail and chukar that he shot (his partner keeps a vegetarian kitchen). My mother helped me defeather the birds and remove the internal organs. She was a real pro—she did it so quickly. I want to be able to do the fish equivalent.

What do you consider your greatest edible achievement?

Okay, so I'm not a great cook by any standard. The individual who has the most faith in my cooking (and coincidentally the most conviction that I will drop things in the kitchen) is my dog. And most of my cooking has an experimental element. A few years ago, I added soy sauce lees (the solids left over from making soy sauce) to chocolate chip cookie batter. The cookies tasted different. I enjoyed them. And I was ecstatic and surprised when a friend's son said they were so delicious

he saved them so he could have one for breakfast every day until they ran out. He requested them the next time I visited too.

If you were to die and come back as an (edible) animal, vegetable, or mineral, what would you like it to be?

I'll take my chances with coming back as a capybara. If I came back as a capybara in a Japanese zoo and not someplace where I'd be someone's dinner, I'd get to do a lot of socializing and hanging out in hot spring baths.

Where (and/or when) would you most like to dine?

I've wanted to go to Tunisia for a very long time—ever since I went to a small Tunisian restaurant in the Boston area where every dish was full of different flavours, many of them new, even revelatory.

When do you have no appetite?

After I've eaten! Or when I'm absorbed in whatever I'm doing, though it's also easier to be absorbed in what you're doing when you're not hungry...

What is your most treasured kitchen implement?

I don't really have any irreplaceable kitchen implements, but I guess I would choose a *donabe* (clay pot) that some friends bought for me at a mutual friend's shop as a housewarming present. It was made by a potter in Shiga Prefecture and it's wide and shallow and perfect for making hot pot dishes.

What do you consider to be the most processed kind of food?

Protein bars, white chocolate, candy, diet cola. And definitely not mint chocolate chip ice cream, chewing gum, doughnuts, Cheddar cheese, or other things that I enjoy.

What is your favourite aroma?

I love the scent of lime. Also cardamom. Other contenders might be the aroma of grilled meat, butter and sugar (think Belgian waffles), or fried garlic.

What spice, kitchen implement, or cookbook do you use most rarely?

I had a small container of asafoetida but realized that I was using it too infrequently and I could smell it in my apartment on hot days, so I ended up tossing it.

What do you most value in your friends?

Support and levity. True friends support each other even as they change and the world changes.

Who are your favourite food scholars?

I've been so lucky to have been part of the ASFS and AFHVS communities. I'm also grateful that I've been able to participate in Japanese food studies networks. I got a master's degree in social anthropology at Oxford, where grades were determined by final written exams that everyone took together. One question was something like "Who is your favourite deceased anthropologist and why?" That question seemed like a trap but I wanted to answer Mary Douglas. Her insights resonate with me still.

Who is your hero of food media?

Alexis Nikole Nelson. The content she puts on Instagram and TikTok is smart, informative, and fun. As for academics on social media, I always pay attention when I see Emily Contois or Krishnendu Ray have posted something new.

With which cuisine do you most identify?

Immigrant cuisine, hands down. My mother was French and she cooked French cuisine in southwestern Pennsylvania. But I've spent time in many different countries and now live in Japan. I'm just as likely to use my wok to prepare dinner as I am to use my Dutch oven or my *donabe*. And my spice blends include Bengal five spice, herbes de Provence, and *shichimi togarashi*...

What is your most powerful sense?

Smell (sigh).

What are your favourite agricultural, culinary, or gastronomic words?

As a consumer, words like "heirloom," "local," and "artisanal" draw my attention. As a scholar, I've become really interested in the onomatopoeic words for describing texture in Japanese. *Pari-pari!* *Fuwa-fuwa!* *Saku-saku!* Last year, when students from the Culinary Institute of America came to Japan, I was invited to give a guest lecture and I took the opportunity to do it on this topic. I got a friend who is a wagashi maker to make two types of sweets using the same ingredients but a slightly different technique to achieve distinctive textures. It was fun.

What is it about composting that you most dislike?

That it's not easy to do when you live in a small apartment in urban Japan!

What would you eat as your last meal?

A lot of people choose something simple and light. I'd want a full meal. I'll start with a cocktail (a whiskey sour?) and an appetizer (maybe a torotaku roll?) Then something decadent like lasagna, followed by steak and a crisp green salad. And some very tasty red wine, the kind I don't usually get to drink. And dessert—tarte Tatin maybe? Or baba au rhum?

What foodish epitaph would you assign to yourself?

"He savoured food and life."

What question would you add to this questionnaire?

"Tell us a story about a food you used to dislike but now like or vice versa."

And...

In response to Lisa Heldke's question, "If you had to cook a meal for a stranger using the contents of your refrigerator and cupboard right now, what would you make?"

Have you ever seen the Korean TV show "Chef & My Fridge"? What a show! It was on Netflix for a while but isn't any more and I'll use this forum to advocate for its return (Netflix execs, are you listening?) Every episode features celebrities whose real life fridges are wheeled into

the TV studio where famous chefs compete by making dishes using ingredients from the fridges. Anyway, if a stranger came to my house and I had to prepare something for them with what I have on hand . . . it would depend on whether they're vegetarian or not. I'd give them that classic airplane question: chicken or pasta? The chicken would be teriyaki and the pasta would be garlic and olive oil.