

Glutamate News

Kyoto, Japan.

3 Michelin Star Fat Duck Restaurant's Heston Blumenthal joins a ground breaking Master Class to explore opportunities for culinary innovation with Japanese chefs.

This past week-end saw a gathering of the world's leading thinkers, in the field of molecular gastronomy, for a Master Class designed to introduce the concept to Japan and to explore the opportunities which greater understanding of food and taste will provide in the future.

While molecular gastronomy may not be the easiest term to understand, it accurately describes how some of the world's leading chefs are using science to create new food experiences, taste sensations and flavour combinations based on real understanding of how food, cooking and taste work at a molecular level.

The Master Class sessions were given by chefs Yoshihiro Murata (Kikunoi restaurant, Kyoto, Japan) and Heston Blumenthal (The Fat Duck restaurant, Bray, Berkshire) and scientists Gary Beauchamp and Edmund Rolls, provoking a lively discussion facilitated by Professor Kathy Sykes.

The event, a first for Japan, drew an international audience of specialists in the science of taste perception, dietary culture, taste and flavour chemistry, sensory analysis and food technology together with Japanese chefs including internationally renowned Nobu (Nobuyuki Matsuhisa). The programme provided the opportunity to explore discoveries and observations, both scientific and practical, with both Murata and Blumenthal giving examples of how their questioning of traditional approaches to cooking and kitchen lore has provided opportunities to change the way they cook food and deliver taste experiences. It also highlighted the importance of umami, our fifth taste, and its role in giving food, especially the cuisine of Japan, its unique character. Commenting on the growing awareness of the umami taste experience, Nobu said, "as people come to appreciate umami, both the taste and the quality of food will advance and people will become more healthy".

And the learning experience afforded by the Master Class was not all one way. This rather different culture seems to have captured Heston Blumenthal's imagination "this is my first trip to Japan and it's too short.... this has been really inspirational for me". It will be interesting to see how the inspiration translates into new sensations on the menu at The Fat Duck Restaurant.

Information for editors:

Chefs:

Heston Blumenthal: The Fat Duck Restaurant, Bray, UK was awarded a third Michelin star in 2004, just one of the many awards this young chef is piling up for his truly ingenious approach to food.

Yoshihiro Murata: President and Chief Chef at the temple of Kyoto cuisine Kikunoi. Murata-san is keenly interested in the science underpinning cooking and is one of the culinary leaders at the forefront of introducing traditional Japanese cuisine, especially the Kaiseki cuisine of Kyoto, to the world.

Scientists:

Gary Beauchamp Ph.D.: Gary is a director of Monell Chemical Senses Center in Philadelphia, which has a team of more than 100 world-renowned experts in sensory science. An excellent cook himself, he is one of the leaders in the development of scientific understanding of umami taste.

Edmund Rolls D.Sc.: Edmund's research at Oxford University explores learning, memory, emotion, pleasure, smell and taste, including the understanding of how the brain responds to complex tastes. Like Gary, Edmund has been at the forefront of the development of the understanding of umami in the field of neuroscience and taste physiology.

Master of Ceremonies:

Professor Kathy Sykes Ph.D.: Kathy, who holds the Collier Chair in Public Engagement in Science & Technology at Bristol University, has a mission to facilitate the public understanding of science and the human side of scientists! She is a well-known communicator and broadcaster, and one of the team for the popular Rough Science programme now broadcast worldwide by the BBC.

Umami Information Center was set up in 1982 with the purpose of increasing awareness of, and disseminating information about, umami, our fifth taste with sweet, sour, salty and bitter. The Umami Information Center is funded by the Umami Manufacturers Association of Japan.

For further information, including high resolution photographs, please call Ailbhe Fallon on 0044 207 828 1448.