

Zov Karamardian

Chef & Founder of Zov's Restaurants

Founding Member, Les Dames d'Escoffier International, LA/OC Chapter

Before there was a Zov's in Tustin, Newport Coast, Irvine or—coming this summer—San Clemente, Zov Karamardian was cooking up her culinary delights in her home kitchen for A to Z Gourmet Catering, her first venture in the food industry. That was in 1980. Seven years later, she opened Zov's Bistro, which has become a beloved Orange County mainstay. “In the beginning we were only open for lunch,” she recalls. “We are humbled and grateful that we are now entering our third decade of business.” And throughout those three decades, Zov has served as a mentor and role model for other culinary talents—and the community at large, offering her support to numerous organizations, including the MaxLove Project, which helps families fighting pediatric cancer. She's also a founding member of Les Dames d'Escoffier LA/OC Chapter.

There's much more to her story. We caught up with Zov for a little Q&A session, and here's more delish dish...

Is there one culinary figure you admire above all?

My mentor will always be Julia Child! She has taught me everything I know about cooking. I used to follow her to all of her cooking demonstrations and lectures. It was a dream come true when I was introduced to her, and she later mentored me when in the process of writing my first book. I will never forget the slumber party we had at my house.

What do you like most about what you do?

I love creating new menus, mentoring my staff and any person who is interested in cooking. Love to mingle with the guests and learn about them. Love to be part of my community and to give back.

What's the most important lesson you've learned in this business?

I learned that passion is what drives this industry! If you don't have passion for what you do it will show at the end. Throw your clock away as if it does not exist. Be current, and be authentic! Rome was not built in one day; you have to have patience.

Tell us the best advice you've ever gotten.

The best advice I received was to always sign your own checks, and know where your money is being spent.

And what advice would you give to someone following in your footsteps?

Always be current and keep it simple! Connect with people who work for you. Connect with your guests. And always be who you are. Stay humble.

What's one thing most people don't know about you?

I'm terrified of flying.

Now, a few lightning-round questions.

Favorite item on the menu right now... our Angel Hair Pasta, always.

Most indulgent guilty pleasure... potato chips!

Go-to dish when dining at home... I'm the queen of throwing together things from the fridge. I just love making something out of nothing.

Favorite vegetable... okra

Least favorite vegetable... butternut squash

Wine—red or white? Cabernet Sauvignon

Ice cream or crème brûlée? Always crème brûlée!

Surf or turf? Surf!

Burgers and fries, or soup and salad? For sure burgers and fries! It is so satisfying and comforting. I love a great In-N-Out Burger!

Caviar or oysters? Caviar and La Grande Dame Champagne! The BEST.

Brunch or happy hour? Always Brunch—I Love Brunch!