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CRAFTING CULINARY IDENTITY:
A FRAMEWORK OF PRACTICE ROOTED
IN REFLECTION AND GROWTH
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Will Mordido

INTRODUCTION

As a Kiwi-Filipino chef with a background spanning competitions, industry, and educational settings, my practice has been shaped by a diverse range of experiences, mentors, and environments. My recent studies on the Bachelor of Culinary Arts have provided me with an opportunity to reflect on these influences, leading me to develop a professional Framework of Practice (FoP)—a conceptual model that captures the values, principles, and strategies guiding my approach to the culinary arts. This reflective journey has not only helped me to articulate my professional identity but has also provided a structure for ongoing reflection, growth, and leadership within the field.

This paper presents my own evolving FoP, rooted in the intersections of tradition and innovation. It explores how my journey through various culinary roles has led me to identify four core values that consistently underpin my work: the pursuit of mastery, constant learning, creativity driven by curiosity, and a commitment to structure. By examining the development of these values and their application within my professional context, I aim to offer insight into how personal and professional experiences converge to shape a meaningful and intentional culinary practice. In sharing my own Framework of Practice, I hope to contribute to broader conversations about culinary design processes.

MY FRAMEWORK OF PRACTICE

I have chosen a culinary 'tree' model to illustrate the structure of my Framework of Practice.

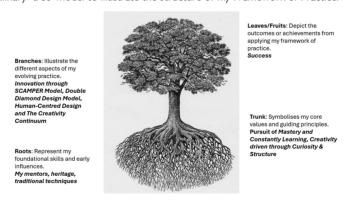


Figure 1. My Culinary Framework of Practice.

Roots: Foundations and early influences

Just as a tree relies on its roots for growth and nourishment, my culinary practice is deeply anchored in the foundations laid by my heritage, experiences, and mentors. These roots provide stability and sustenance, shaping the core of who I am as a chef and guiding my professional journey.

In my early years of creating dishes, drawing inspiration from my Filipino heritage was pivotal. I come from a background where food was central to daily life—flavours, rituals, and techniques were passed down informally through generations. This heritage continues to shape who I am as a chef. Respecting tradition and mastering techniques were further emphasised by one of my early mentors, Peter Ray, during my apprenticeship. Peter ingrained in me the importance of perfecting the basics. Under his guidance, I learned a wide range of traditional (French) techniques. Mastering skills such as seasoning and classic cooking techniques like clarifying, emulsifying, and timings is crucial to applying them successfully in new ways. Peter believed that mastering fundamentals was crucial before exploring new territories.

The creative component of my practice was influenced by my time working as an Assistant Head Chef, following my apprenticeship. During this phase of my career, I was encouraged to constantly push the envelope with dishes, balancing this innovation with a deep respect for the dishes' origins. I also respected their ability to nurture, a value I inherited from my mother. This new creative lens allowed me to re-imagine traditional recipes, transforming them through innovative techniques to present them anew. This balanced approach to dish design and innovation laid the foundations for my practice, ultimately leading to the creation of my own pop-up restaurant—Buko—which embodies my food philosophy of reimagining Filipino cuisine through the application of cutting-edge culinary techniques.

With these strong roots in place, my culinary practice could grow and evolve, leading to the development of the core principles that form the 'trunk' of my Framework of



Figure 2: This is a dish that embodies the duality of my early influences. Here, I have taken my mother's traditional version of the dish, and transformed it through a contemporary, creative lens.

Practice. The trunk represents the sturdy, central values that support and connect all aspects of my professional journey, enabling me to branch out into new areas while remaining grounded in my foundational beliefs.

Trunk: Core values and guiding principles

The trunk of a tree channels nourishment from the roots and provides stability. Similarly, the core principles of my culinary practice serve as the central support system that sustains and strengthens my professional journey. These principles are deeply rooted in my foundational experiences and have evolved to become the guiding forces behind my approach to the culinary arts.

Pursuit of mastery and constant learning

My parents disapproved of my career choice as a chef. They had expected me to pursue a more academic path, influenced by their own backgrounds, which included periods of financial struggle, and their desire to provide their children with more financially stable career options than they had enjoyed. However, being naturally competitive, I was determined to prove them wrong and pursued my passion for cooking anyway. My culinary achievements and the financial viability of my career exceeded my parents' expectations. As I progressed in the industry, my journey evolved into a continuous process of mastering everything I put my mind to and constantly learning. This commitment to excellence ensures that my work consistently meets the highest standards of quality.

As my career progressed and I took on more challenging projects, my pursuit of mastery remained strong. A good example of this is my recent involvement with the Bocuse d'Or, a biennial world chef championship named after Paul Bocuse. While innovation and presentation are highly respected in the competition, mastery of the basics—good seasoning, correct execution of techniques, and clean and precise cooking practices—is what ultimately wins the judges over. I paid homage to Peter's teachings by ensuring that the fundamentals were well covered in all aspects of the competition.

In general terms, deliberate practice plays a key role in the pursuit of mastery in my Framework of Practice. Deliberate practice is a focused and purposeful approach to skill development, first theorised by psychologist Anders Ericsson in 1993. His work emphasises that expertise is achieved not merely through experience, but through structured and intentional practice designed to improve performance (Ericsson et al., 1993). For me, this process begins with learning in depth about a skill or an outcome I want to achieve, and setting out practical, systematic and structured steps to get there. This is then followed by repetition, getting every aspect of the dish or a concept right and evaluating at each step, seeking where improvements can be implemented. Irrespective of an individual's internalised desire for perfection, I believe that 'perfectionism,' especially in a culinary context, simply doesn't exist. There are always areas to improve, tweaks to make, or someone's palette that you can never satisfy. However, the desire to inch closer and closer to 'perfection' forms part of this pursuit of mastery and being in a constant state of learning to achieve it. Reflecting on my career, I place great importance on this aspect of my practice as it constitutes the integrity of a chef, instilled in me by my mentors. The fact that I have gone through the process of getting every aspect right, or at the very least trying to do so, gives me the satisfaction that I have given each task the thought and care it deserves and given myself justice by mastering this craft.

Creativity driven by curiosity

Creativity, driven by my naturally curious nature, guides me to continually explore and innovate within the culinary landscape. Influenced by the mentorship I received when working as an Assistant Head Chef, this principle encourages me to push boundaries while respecting the integrity of traditional dishes. This also takes me back to some foundational influences: to my childhood days as that young 'chef,' wanting to know what my mother was doing in the kitchen, and to my time as a young up-and-coming chef, experimenting with different techniques and ingredients as I geared up for culinary competitions.

Spanish chef Ferran Adrià, renowned for his innovative approach at elBulli, emphasises the call for creativity in haute cuisine: "There's always been art in haute cuisine. What's happening now is that there is a demand for the art to be surprising, to have a greater design factor" (Lubow, 2003). Adrià's commitment to continuous innovation challenges culinary conventions and inspires me to re-imagine and transform classic recipes into contemporary masterpieces. This approach was evident in my creations at the Bocuse d'Or, where traditional flavours were re-imagined through innovative techniques, with creativity reinforced through the bespoke vessels the dishes were held in. In this way, I tried to echo Adrià's influence on modern gastronomy: "It is a movement in Spain. It is not only me. In a culture with a very strong traditional gastronomy, there is a cuisine for the first time with new techniques and concepts. It is a new nouvelle cuisine," Adrià affirms (Lubow, 2003). Adrià's ability to integrate tradition with innovation resonates deeply with my own culinary philosophy.

Through my research, I also began diving deeper into a chef I had looked up to since I was an apprentice. American chef and restaurateur Grantz Achatz has a very interesting approach to creativity, much of which still resonates with me today. Achatz describes his process as beginning

somewhere in the back of my mind: what ingredient, what manipulation, and how many permutations. The equation becomes more complicated, and usually takes a few wrong turns, before we find the answer. But it all boils down to the same logical process that can often only be identified in hindsight. (Achatz & Kokonas, 2008, as cited in Kudrowitz et al., 2014)

In my creative practice, I ask myself similar questions—what can I do with this ingredient that is different? How many technical or even textural manipulations can I make to make something 'new'?

As my understanding of my creative practice has evolved, I have come to understand what differentiates my practice from some of the culinary greats I look up to and their approaches to creativity. Chefs such as Ferran Adrià, Rene Redzepi, and Grant Achatz have made names for themselves because of their highly original, innovative approaches to creativity. The differences in our approaches can be explained in the context of the creativity continuum (Figure 3).

Jablokow's paper "Thinking About Thinking: Problem Solving Style in the Engineering Classroom" explores the influence of cognitive styles on problem-solving, highlighting Kirton's Adaption-Innovation (AI) Theory (Jablokow, 2000). This theory suggests that while everyone is creative, individuals differ in their problem-solving approaches, ranging from adaptive, which favours structured and efficient solutions, to innovative, which embraces unstructured and unconventional methods that challenge the status quo.

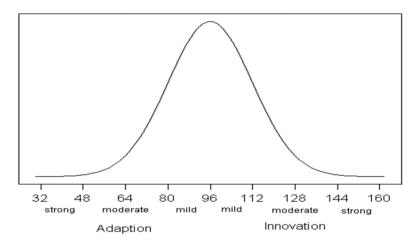
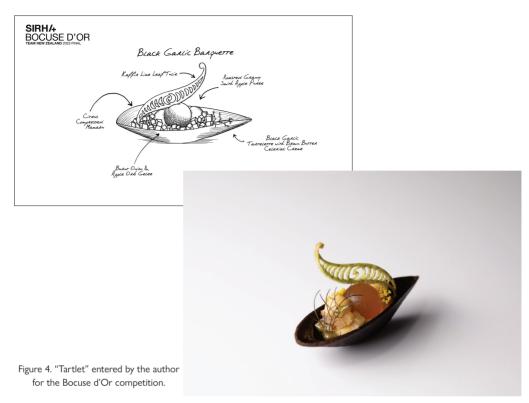


Figure 3. The Creativity Continuum as measured by the Kirton Adaptation-Innovation Inventory, a test to score problem-solving styles (Jablokow, 2000).

The creativity continuum illustrates adaption at one end and innovation at the other. While the chefs I look up to sit near the higher end of innovation, creating novel concepts and approaches, I would place myself somewhere in the middle. This is evident in my work where I favour original concepts, flavour combinations, and techniques, reimagining, reinterpreting, and adapting them to create something that is uniquely my own. I place great importance on the need for structure, setting me apart from these chefs who thrive outside the confines of limitations, rules or set criteria, or choose to question or ignore them. In contrast, I flourish in an environment where clear guidelines and structure are in place. This is where I find my creativity.

An important tool that allows me to create new dishes by adapting and re-imagining existing concepts, techniques and combinations is the SCAMPER model, theorised by Bob Eberle in 1972. SCAMPER is an acronym that stands for Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify/Magnify, Put to other use, Eliminate/Minify, and Reverse/Rearrange. All these elements are about making incremental changes to known entities to produce something novel (Kudrowitz et al., 2014).

In a broad sense, I will adapt existing concepts and use elements of the SCAMPER model, making relevant tweaks to create something new. Figure 4 shows an example from the Bocuse d'Or competition, where I used a range of SCAMPER tools to re-imagine and push the boundaries of what a tartlet can be.



Substitute: Instead of the usual cucumber, I used mamaku, adding a distinctive New Zealand touch. This substitution not only introduced a local ingredient, but also redefined the tartlet's flavour profile and texture.

Combine: I blended traditional flavours like apple, celeriac, onion, and black garlic in innovative ways. This combination enhanced the dish's complexity and depth, creating an intriguing culinary experience.

Adapt: I adapted the tartlet concept by experimenting with different shapes and textures. By incorporating 3D printing technology, I transformed the traditional tartlet into a new form that challenges conventional presentations.

Modify: My use of 3D printing represented a significant modification in the presentation of the dish. It was a departure from using standard plates, creating a novel canvas for showcasing the tartlet that reflected a more modern and creative approach.

Put to another use: The 3D printing technology, typically used for applications that do not include food, was repurposed here to craft an entirely new kind of tartlet. This new use of technology pushed the boundaries of culinary presentation.

Eliminate: By moving away from traditional tartlet designs and conventional ingredients, I eliminated the expected and introduced a fresh perspective. This elimination of standard practices opened up new possibilities for how dishes can be conceived and enjoyed.

Reverse: I reversed the traditional role of a tartlet by re-imagining its form and function. Instead of a simple, conventional tartlet, this dish embodies cutting-edge innovation that challenges and expands the traditional boundaries of culinary art.



Structure

Structure provides the necessary 'box' for organising my creative thoughts and expressing these ideas logically and systematically. I find comfort in the confines of structure, as it allows me to approach projects with a clear set of rules, criteria or guidelines. Whether these guidelines are predefined or ones I set myself, they help me navigate the creative process more effectively.

As someone who comes from a big family, my upbringing was somewhat chaotic, and I had an often disorganised household to cope with. Later, when I



Figure 5. Final plating of the tartlet.

started my job with Restaurant X, I found similar conditions there, with no real systems or procedures in place. This experience reinforced my need for structure and became part of why I value it in my practice.

There is a stark contrast between my upbringing and past professional experiences and my current practice framework. Today, clear goals and desired outcomes are laid out, and the necessary steps to achieve them are broken down into practical, attainable milestones.

This approach helps explain my love of competitions, which give me the framework I need and crave to succeed: a theme to follow, and specific requirements, rules, and criteria, all under strict time constraints. This structure helps to break down the journey from ideation to execution into small, attainable milestones that lead to success. While some might view this approach as restrictive, these constraints and structure provide me with a framework to fuel my creativity and ambitions. This links closely to Damadzic's research, which suggests that "constraints may enhance creativity by limiting the problem space. Limiting the problem space, in turn, eliminates typical solutions and forces those working on a creative task to engage in a deep search within a small set of potential solutions" (Damadzic, 2024, p. 3).

Earlier, I described my need to "prove my parents wrong" and show them that the career choice I made was indeed the right one. Fast-forward to today, and I still hold this belief. And while the accolades and the thrill of culinary competitions are important, what motivates me the most is being in that constant state of learning and creativity. This is what fuels this career that I have been fighting for most of my life—to prove that it was the right choice all along. Being so strongly driven means that I carry a heavy workload, managing many projects simultaneously and keeping multiple stakeholders accountable. Having detailed structures around my work also reassures me that tasks are being completed to the high standard I hold myself to.

Branches: Design process and innovations

From the sturdy trunk of my culinary practice, which is rooted in core principles, extend the branches of design. In these branches, the Double Diamond Design Process and Human-Centred Design play pivotal roles, enriching my approach to culinary innovation. These principles of thoughtful design and user-centric approaches drive the development of new culinary techniques and dishes, showcasing the dynamic growth and diversification of my culinary career. As Parreira (2024) highlights, the chef's creative process is rooted in an intimate understanding of the audience, ensuring that each dish not only meets but exceeds the expectations of those who experience it. My design model mirrors the creative dynamics of haute cuisine as discussed by Parreira (2024), where each dish undergoes a transformative process from concept through execution.

My approach is also anchored in the Double Diamond Design Model, a framework that emphasises iterative cycles of divergence and convergence throughout the creative process. This model comprises four key phases: Discover, Define, Develop, and Deliver. In my culinary practice, the Discover phase parallels the initial exploration of ingredients, techniques and cultural influences—broadening the scope to gather inspiration and insights. This reflects my commitment to deepening my understanding of both traditional and contemporary culinary practices, ensuring that my dishes are not only innovative but also deeply rooted in a rich context.

The Define phase corresponds to refining these ideas into a clear culinary concept or theme. Here, I converge on specific goals, such as flavour profiles or presentation aesthetics, much like the decision-making process in Human-Centred Design, which focuses on users and their experience. The Develop phase then involves the experimentation and iteration of these ideas, where dishes are tested, adjusted, and perfected, capturing the hands-on, iterative nature of culinary creativity.

Finally, the Deliver phase aligns with the execution and presentation of the final dish, where the culmination of the entire process is revealed to the audience. This mirrors the conclusion of the Double Diamond process, where the focus shifts from internal development to external impact.

Both my model and the Double Diamond Design Model emphasise a cyclical and iterative approach, ensuring that each phase builds on the previous one to refine and enhance the final outcome. However, a key difference lies in the application: while the Double Diamond Model is often applied broadly across design disciplines, my model is specifically tailored to the culinary arts, incorporating sensory elements and a deep understanding of audience expectations, as highlighted by Parreira (2024). This tailored approach aligns with the Double Diamond framework but also extends it by integrating the unique demands of culinary innovation, ensuring that each dish resonates on both a creative and emotional level with the diner.



Figure 6. The Double Diamond Design Model (British Design Council, 2005).

With all these elements in mind, I have compressed a number of steps and factors to illustrate the different aspects of my evolving practice. Whether I am designing new dishes, gathering ideas for an event or participating in a culinary competition, the practice evolves accordingly. While the process begins as a linear model, it evolves into a circular one, which mimics the lifecycle of my 'culinary tree' Framework of Practice.

THE BRANCHES OF MY EVOLVING PRACTICE



Figure 7. My design process.

The brief

This is the stage where I process the task at hand, along with its criteria, rules, and limitations. This step is akin to what Parreira describes as "a creative process start[ing] with information gathering and applied knowledge" (2024, p. 86). It involves a lot of fact-finding to fully understand the brief, evaluating any foreseeable hurdles and creating the necessary steps to overcome them. I also analyse external factors beyond my control that could hinder me in achieving the desired result. This is where I build the framework for the end result. Having the necessary structure is so important to me, as it ultimately dictates the outcome. Additionally, I investigate who the end user is, which is why incorporating Human-Centred Design into my culinary practice is crucial. It helps me create the most meaningful impact.

Ideation

At this stage, I start prototyping what the outcome could look like, based on the brief or the framework I have created for myself. I am often inspired by existing concepts and use elements of the SCAMPER model to start creating the early stages of a dish or parts of it. I form an initial proposal of what an event or pop-up might be, or just conceptualise ideas on paper. There is an aspect of collaboration at this stage, as I often bounce ideas around within my team and play on their strengths to get the best outcome.

Iteration

This is where my pursuit of mastery plays a key role, as the original concepts will always go through many stages of testing, changes and improvements, rigorously reflecting Parreira's (2024) emphasis on the iterative and experimental nature of haute cuisine. I will consider the original brief so that I do not stray too far from the task at hand, while still maintaining a high level of creativity. Parreira observes that the chef's creative process involves "the ability to generate compromises between what is desired and what is possible, and to find a balance" (2024, p. 88) that allows for culinary innovation while working within the constraints of the brief. Crafting and refining play a crucial role at this stage. Here is where I also evaluate any potential risks that could compromise the outcome and devise necessary steps to overcome those should they occur.

Execution

At this stage of the process, I do not deviate much from the latest iteration phase and 'execute' as close to the plan as possible. The execution could take the form of recreating a dish I have spent time conceptualising, or executing an event based on a carefully detailed outline.

Feedback

Gaining insight into areas for improvement is crucial for me to stay in a constant state of creativity and growth. Evaluating the impact of my outcomes and reflecting on feedback provides new frameworks for enhancing future projects, fuelling my ambitions as a culinarian.

Research and reflection

Research plays a key role in all aspects of my evolving practice, including at the end of the process, where I seek ways to improve. I also reflect on the completed project or task and ask what could have been done differently or better to constantly stay on the path of improvement. This reflective practice, which is critical in Human-Centred Design, embodies Parreira's idea that "evaluation brings together a set of concerns expressed by the chefs" (2024, p. 88) and is essential for continuous improvement. I then take key learnings into the next 'brief,' where this cycle restarts, as illustrated in Figure 8.

MY EVOLVING PRACTICE



Figure 8. My evolving practice: A cyclical process.

Leaves and fruits: Outcomes and achievements

Reflecting on my Framework of Practice, I cannot help but feel proud of the many achievements and opportunities it has enabled. My career has been a great platform to help me maintain a constant state of creativity, enriching my knowledge as a culinarian. One achievement I would highlight is the creation of my own pop-up restaurant business, Buko. The idea was floated during my days at Restaurant X, a particularly challenging period during my career when a lack of structure and autonomy prevented me from being able to thrive in my work or make a significant positive impact upon the business. Buko allowed me the autonomy to continue creating and expressing ideas through different dining experiences. I was finally able to create and provide the necessary structure that enabled me, and others involved, to thrive. It also helped me right some of the wrongs that I had experienced at Restaurant X. Although it was stressful building a brand and a business from the ground up, my experience at Buko was in stark contrast to the negative feelings I had endured at Restaurant X and allowed me to accelerate my leadership skills and career.

Participating in culinary competitions has also been a big part of my career and represents the "fruit and leaves" of my Framework of Practice. On reflection, my FoP encompasses what competitions are all about: pursuit of mastery, creativity, structure, and working with constraints. I took part in the Bocuse d'Or, dubbed "one of the world's most prestigious cooking competitions," and this competition has shaped how I view food and create and design dishes.

The new sapling: My evolving Framework of Practice

The 'fruits' of my labour hold the seeds of my future Framework of Practice. They fuel my motivation to keep learning and offer the structure necessary to embark on new projects. Each new endeavour opens doors to future growth and creates an environment in which I thrive. As these fruits fall, they give rise to fresh iterations of my FoP, a new sapling, signalling opportunities for further development as a culinarian. While this conception of my framework is bound to evolve, the seeds it plants will give rise to new saplings, carrying the DNA of the original tree yet evolving into something new and unique, demonstrating the continuous nature of learning and adaptation in the culinary world.

This evolving framework reflects my ongoing journey as a culinarian. It embraces new influences, techniques, and philosophies, shaping my professional identity. As I take on new challenges and opportunities, my practice evolves, reflecting a deeper understanding of my craft and a commitment to innovation and excellence.

Much like a sapling grows and matures into a robust tree, my Framework of Practice will continue to adapt to the changing landscape of the culinary industry. This process involves integrating new technologies, sustainability practices, and diverse culinary traditions while staying true to my core values of mastery, creativity, and structure.

CONCLUSION

The journey of my culinary career illustrates the dynamic and evolving nature of my Framework of Practice. By reflecting on my experiences, mentors, and the values that shape my professional identity, I have developed a unique approach that blends traditional techniques with innovative practices. The roots of my practice are firmly planted in the foundational experiences and mentorship that have guided me, while the trunk represents the core values that sustain my professional journey.

Through the branches of evolving practices and innovations, I've explored how design principles like the Double Diamond Design Process and Human-Centred Design intersect with culinary arts. These principles have enriched my approach to culinary innovation, allowing me to create dishes that resonate with both cultural authenticity and contemporary appeal.

The leaves and fruits of my framework represent the achievements and outcomes that have marked my career, from creating a pop-up restaurant business to participating in prestigious culinary competitions. These experiences have reinforced the importance of continuous creativity and learning within my practice.

Looking to the future, the new sapling symbolises the ongoing evolution of my practice. It reflects my commitment to growth, adaptation and the pursuit of excellence in the culinary arts. By embracing new influences and opportunities, I will continue to refine and expand my Framework of Practice, ensuring that it remains relevant and impactful in an ever-changing gastronomic landscape. As I move forward, my focus is on staying true to my core values while navigating the ever-changing landscape of the culinary industry in a sustainable way.

Will Mordido is a Kiwi-Filipino chef, known for being the first ever representative at the prestigious Bocuse d'Or as well as his pop-up restaurant, Buko. His career is marked by a commitment to creative innovation, competition excellence, and expanding the boundaries of what is means to be a chef.

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