

The chef with 18 Michelin stars who's still largely undiscovered outside of France

 cnn.com/travel/yannick-alleno-michelin-starred-chef

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EDITOR'S NOTE: CNN Original Series "Eva Longoria: Searching for France" traces the iconic origins of French cuisine. Watch Sundays at 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. ET/PT on CNN, with episodes [streaming the next day on the CNN app](#).

In the gardens of Paris' emblematic Champs Élysées, tucked behind the Petit Palais where works by Rembrandt, Gauguin and Cézanne decorate the walls, is an ornate two-story Neoclassical building with a buttercream and forest green façade.

The Pavillon Ledoyen is a historic restaurant that since 1792 has hosted names like Monet, Degas and Zola. Local legend even suggests Napoleon Bonaparte and Joséphine de Beauharnais first met here before it became a restaurant.

Today owned by the city of Paris, the building has become a revered address that is only entrusted to skilled hands. Under Christian Le Squer, the restaurant received three Michelin

stars in 2002, a status it held until Le Squer moved to Le Cinq at the nearby Four Seasons George V hotel in 2014.

When Yannick Alléno was named his successor, he came with a proven track record. The Parisian chef held six stars: three at one of the French capital's legendary palace hotels, [Le Meurice](#), and three at [Le 1947 à Cheval Blanc](#) in the French ski resort of Courchevel.

Alléno secured his own trio of stars at the address with unusual speed. Just seven months after opening, [Alléno Paris](#) — as he named the restaurant — was awarded three stars by Michelin inspectors.

Alléno has continued to build Pavillon Ledoyen's reputation — at a price. Diners pay upwards of 330 euros, about \$390, for a menu served in its sunlit, heritage-listed dining room. He has also opened two more restaurants inside the building: the two-star Franco-Japanese [L'Abyse Paris](#) and one-star [Pavillon Paris](#).

He has steadily expanded his presence outside France to locations including Monaco, Dubai, the United Kingdom, Japan, the UAE, South Korea and Qatar. Yet despite his stars and a new [Michelin-starred breakfast menu](#) at his Pavillon London at the Four Seasons Hotel, Alléno remains little known outside of his native France, where his innovations in the kitchen, particularly around sauces, have made him one of the most celebrated figures in the country's culinary landscape.

The chef with 18 stars

Earlier this year, at the 2026 Michelin Guide France & Monaco ceremony, [Monsieur Dior at 30 Montaigne](#), Alléno's restaurant inside the Parisian building where the fashion house Dior was founded, was awarded its first star.

It took Alléno's current tally of stars to 18 across 21 restaurants; a figure that, according to Alléno's website, makes him one of the two most starred chefs in the world alongside Alain Ducasse.

Alléno says the success far exceeds the expectations he had when he dreamed of becoming a chef as an eight-year-old in the suburbs outside central Paris.

"I come from a big family, one of those families that feels out of the novels that we romanticize today," he tells CNN Travel.

His parents ran a popular neighborhood bistro, and his grandmother and cousins were another influence in the home kitchen. "It was thanks to them that I was inspired to pursue this

career,” he says.

He trained under traditional French chefs — many holding the prestigious *Meilleurs Ouvriers de France* title, one of France’s top culinary honors. He worked his way through Paris’ fine dining kitchens, earning his first Michelin star in 2000 at Scribe.

For Alléno, the stars are a proof of concept. He aims to move French cuisine beyond the foundations set by Auguste Escoffier in the 19th century.

“It means that all of the reform that we’ve undertaken actually works,” he says.

Alléno has dedicated significant time and effort into reinventing sauces, what he calls “the verbs of French cuisine” — or the language that connects seemingly disparate ingredients such as beef fillet and asparagus into a cohesive and harmonious dish.

Under Escoffier, the role of *Saucier* (sauce maker) was once among the most prestigious in the kitchen, but became increasingly rare from the beginning of the 1970s with the arrival of *nouvelle cuisine*.

Alléno has revived the saucier’s craft but with modern techniques such as dehydration, fermentation and cryoconcentration to distill the essence of a flavor into a spoonful of sauce.

He calls his method “extractions.” It creates liquid versions of complex flavors; for example, on the [menu](#) at [Pavillon Monte-Carlo](#), a turbot filet brushed with mustard is served with a *cacio e pepe* sauce, made from extracted pecorino cheese combined with a pepper butter and emulsified.

“I needed to write my own culinary vocabulary, one that can only be expressed through sauces,” he says. His work has stirred conversation about sauces in French kitchens, emphasizing their role in the country’s culinary identity.

“France is talking about sauces again, and we’ve inspired many young chefs, which is good, because it means we were overlooking something essential: the sauce-based dishes that speak to the singularity of the country,” he says.

The Alléno paradox

Several factors may explain why Alléno’s public profile is lower than his star count. The 57-year-old family man with a warm smile and a quick sense of humor avoids controversy. He focuses on technical execution, letting the spotlight fall on his dishes rather than him.

“Yannick Alléno is better known in Europe largely because his culinary style, modern/Nouvelle cuisine, travels differently than more narrative-driven traditions,” says Usha Haley, the Barton distinguished chair in international business at Wichita State University.

“Alléno lets the food do the talking, rather than overshadowing it with a surrounding ‘story,’” says Haley, who has spent several years studying what distinguishes Michelin-starred chefs. “Diners become incredibly loyal because of the quality of his cuisine. On the other hand, it makes it harder for his name to become known to those who don’t have direct experience of his restaurants.”

For Haley, Alléno is one of the most “intellectually serious chefs working anywhere in the world today.”

“His work on sauces and fermentation-based extraction fundamentally reimagined what French cuisine can be, and that takes extraordinary courage.”

A marquee year



Alléno’s workload is increasing in 2026. He is overseeing the culinary program at the newly-opened [COMO Le Beauvallon](#) in Saint-Tropez, one of 2026’s most anticipated hotel openings,

and he's also the executive chef of newly launched [Orient Express Corinthian](#), the world's largest sailing yacht.

The collaboration with Yannick Alléno reflects Orient Express's ambition to surround itself with the "greatest talents," Sébastien Bazin, chairman & CEO of Accor Group, the owner of Orient Express, says of the partnership.

Alléno will be helming five restaurants on the Corinthian, which he calls the "new flagship of French luxury and savoir-faire."

"To be chosen as the chef makes me proud because ultimately it's everything I love about our beautiful country," he says. While France "has its flaws," he adds, "above all, it is a remarkable country, capable of creating the most extraordinary things. I'm proud to be French."

Alléno, in typical humor, says he already has his life vest ready for the day he steps onboard. And he is quick to share credit with others for his achievements.

"People say, 'Yannick Alléno has 18 Michelin stars,' but it's a team that is being recognized above all," he says. "I am surrounded by extremely competent and capable people and I am merely the guide. Seeing them all grow is wonderful."

More than 40 chefs whom he has mentored or worked with have gone on to receive stars themselves, a track record that earned him the Michelin Chef Mentor Award in 2024. The guide [described him](#) as "a true leading light of modern French gastronomy and an outstanding creator who is particularly committed to passing on his knowledge."

"I pursued this profession to give others pleasure and happiness," Alléno reflects; even on his days off he can't keep out of the kitchen. "I love opening a good bottle of wine with friends, and, like everyone, I'll make a roast chicken or put a leg of lamb in the oven," he says.

Alléno is currently sitting atop the culinary world, but he says he has no plans to slow down.

"I'm just beginning my career."