



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Portrait Gallery*

## **Portrait Presentation: A Conversation with Alice Waters**

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<i>José Andrés</i>: —the truth is that it is not very often that we find someone, that has a will, to do something. A will to change things.

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We all have passions. But sometimes we keep those passions for our own.

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When we see a woman like Alice, that what she believe in, she decides not to be quiet, but to express herself through her dishes. And to express herself through her opinions so she can help every one of us is really something to be applaud.

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So, let's see if we are able to be taken away from her. That secret ingredient that made her. Without a doubt — I would not say, the most influential woman in cooking — but without a doubt, one of the most influential period, people that are making this thing, about food.

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So, Alice, um, do you remember when we met?

<i>Alice Waters</i>: I do, indeed. Right here in Washington. Right on the Mall.

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<i>José Andrés</i>: And I can tell you - it was this guy - Joe Nathan call me, to meet you: "I'm bringing Alice Waters to your restaurant". And I went to the restaurant, and I began asking every single cook, sous chef: Where is this coming from? Is this local? [[audience laughter]]

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<i>Alice Waters</i>: But it was during the Food-Life Festival at the Mall, probably—

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Was that seven years ago?

<i>José Andrés</i>: Six, seven years ago?

<i>Alice Waters</i>: Six or seven years ago? I can't remember the exact—

<i>José Andrés</i>: By the Smithsonian. The Folk Life Festival - one of the most amazing festival, anywhere in the world.

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<i>José Andrés</i>: And you came, and you came with a mission.

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<i>Alice Waters</i>: I did. I did come with a mission. I don't know whether anybody came to our edible schoolyard there, but we built a garden. And we grew corn!

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<i>José Andrés</i>: In the middle of the Mall!

<i>Alice Waters</i>: In the middle of the Mall. In the middle of the Mall. I think I have a picture of it in this book about the Edible Schoolyard—

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—And because there were pictures that were taken, and you saw the Capitol Building behind, and then you saw the corn there, and—

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<i>José Andrés</i>: She was like a hippy from the 60s. But still, she is. For a reason, she made Berkeley her home. And she's an activist at heart, because she's always been, and she always will be.

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But you came with a mission. And you had the idea to put a place, not a restaurant, but a place to share food. Tell us what, because a lot of people don't know— a restaurant in the middle of the Mall, with no walls!

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<i>Alice Waters</i>: But it wasn't really a restaurant.

<i>José Andrés</i>: What it was?

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<i>Alice Waters</i>: What I wanted to do - and Joe Nathan was cheerleading, in the back there all the time, for the Smithsonian, and trying to negotiate what we wanted. And—

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I kept saying, you know we really want to demonstrate what this could look like in a school. So, we really want to plant a garden with all the real herbs. And we want to build the structure in the middle, like a Ramada, where the kids come at the Edible Schoolyard in Berkeley, and they sit at the beginning of the class, and talk and decide what they're going to be doing that day in the garden.

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So, it meant construction. And it meant a huge amount of planting and planning to plant - that had to go on.

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Well, it was a boiling hot summer.

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It was a boiling hot summer, and—

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I think the people who were asked to do this - who were part of the Smithsonian - I think they had not quite the whole idea of how big I needed it to be. How— you know, I kind of wanted, a quarter of an acre. [[audience laughter]]

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<i>José Andrés</i>: Well, let's face it, she wanted the entire Mall!

<i>Alice Waters</i>: I really wanted the whole Mall - it was true! I really wanted the whole Mall, but - alas!

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But they gave us the end - which was beautiful because it had a view right out to the Capitol, on that side.

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And what I wanted to do - was make a table there, under an awning, under a shade structure, and really pretend that the people we invited there were like the students who would come to the garden.

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So, we built a wood-fired oven out on the Mall, like the one that we had in Berkeley—

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And we asked our friend, Ann Yonkers at the farmers market, would she figure out how we could get the fruits and vegetables from the market—

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And we were going to invite people to the table that had never been seated together at one time.

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And we were not sure that they would all come, because we really wanted Hillary Clinton, and Barbara Boxer, and we wanted Tom Harkin, and—

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And when we called the offices, they say, well you know, they might drive by, you know we're not sure, they might come in and say hello—

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I'm not sure that they can take off a half an hour, an hour, and have lunch, but we'll see how it works out—

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And we invited restaurateurs. And we invited Robert from the D.C. Central Kitchen. We brought in activists—

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It turned out that we, in the end, to make the garden work, I had to call every friend I knew, within about 200-mile radius, including

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all of the people that were involved, to students up at Yale who had built the Yale Sustainable Food Project and were involved in the garden there—

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And so - we had this kind of massive effort to lift this idea up. And I have to say, that when, um, you know these very busy people came by, and sat at the table, they didn't want to go.

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And so, we had this beautiful opportunity to have people, that don't have lunch together, you know, having a conversation about 'edible education'.

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And I think the really important moment for me, was with Tom Harkin - because I was seated next to him - and I said, you know, this idea is, I want it at every school in the country.

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And he said, well what did you have in mind? And I said, I want to feed every child for free, at school.

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And I want to buy all the food from local sustainable farms, from that region.

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And I want the cafeteria to be taken out of catering and put into academia.

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And I want it all tied together in the curriculum.

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And he said, I know what you mean. [[audience laughter]] He said, I get it. He said, I can't do that, but I get it.



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