

Maggie Tang: The Freshman Who Worked at a Three Michelin Star Restaurant

From fine dining to the freshman meal plan.



Maggie Tang with the owner of Atelier Crenn, Dominique Crenn

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Throughout her four years in high school, Maggie Tang (W '22) prepared dessert for 120 students and staff 200 times. But her passion for food exceeds beyond just pastry goods. In her senior year, she had the chance to intern, or *stage*, at Atelier Crenn, a three Michelin star French cuisine restaurant in San Francisco.

Behind an unassuming facade, Atelier Crenn is a featured restaurant on *Chef's Table*. This restaurant maximizes customers' gustatory experience through a selection of exquisite courses. Dominique Crenn, the chef-proprietor, and Juan Contreras, the Chef Pâtissier, offers a menu experience that starts at \$335.

Before high school, Maggie had never baked before. Her high school, Midland School, is a co-ed boarding school near Los Olivos, California that focuses on experiential education where the students grow their food, generate electricity for the dorm, and heat up the water. "70% of all the food we eat was grown on our school's 10 acre farm." Maggie said, "And that's how I really got into cooking and baking because I made Sunday breakfast for my entire class and helped out in my school's kitchen for 12 hours a week."

Maggie found the opportunity to work at Atelier Crenn by chance. It is part of Midland's tradition that seniors are sent away during their "Experiential Week." Maggie decided to use this period of time to explore her interest in food. She cold-called the restaurant and was able to earn a spot for internship. Even though she used to bake at her high school, she knew nothing about cooking, not to mention fine dining, back then.

At first, the internship was not supposed to last long. However, after spending her spring break at Atelier Crenn, her colleagues offered to let her come back during the summer. “In total, I think I *staged* there for a total of a month and a half,” Maggie said.

Maggie worked in both savory and pastry kitchens at Atelier Crenn. Every day during her internship, she would arrive at the restaurant at 6:00 a.m. to start preparing dishes, cutting pieces of mermaid hair and picking mustard flowers. Sometimes she went along with the chefs to the farmer’s market to get fresh food.

The internship didn’t start off easy for Maggie. Within the first five minutes of her first day of work, she cut herself. “At first, I was very nervous because it’s a three Michelin star restaurant,” Maggie said, “but people there are just so hardworking and patient. They would teach me from the beginning. It’s a thing at this restaurant that every day we go around and shake everybody’s hand just to say hi.”

One dessert that Maggie enjoyed making at Atelier Crenn was Patissier Juan Contreras’ coconut and pineapple signature dessert. To make this dessert, Maggie explained that she “used a water balloon, injected coconut cream, spun it in liquid nitrogen, painted it with chocolate, and filled it with passion fruit sorbet.”

At the end of her senior year, she wrote a senior thesis paper on working at Atelier Crenn, talking about the emotions involved in working in the fine dining service industry.

Though Maggie is currently exploring her interests in finance and management in

Wharton, she maintains her passion for food and sustainability. Looking ahead, she is thinking about working in an industry in which she can merge her two interests—food and management. "People in this [restaurant] industry are so inspiring given how hard they work," Maggie said. "They really love what they do."

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