

FLAVOUR NOTES

SERIES II

The Chef's Flavour System

A Weekly Journal from The Chef's Spice Chest

Understanding Flavour — The Way Chefs Build It
“Where Ingredients Become Flavour”

CHEFSNOTEBOOKS.com

Issue 05 — Umami

The Depth System

Flavour System Focus: Foundations

Bitterness is often avoided in the kitchen, yet it is one of the most important elements in Umami is often described as savoury, but in professional kitchens it functions as something more precise—it is depth. It is the quality that gives food presence, length, and completeness. Unlike salt or acid, which define and sharpen, umami builds. It accumulates through ingredients, processes, and time. Stocks, reductions, aged products, and slow cooking all contribute to its development. The result is not simply flavour, but structure—a sense that the dish holds together and satisfies beyond the first taste.

Understanding umami as a system allows the chef to move beyond richness into controlled depth, avoiding heaviness while maintaining intensity. This week's focus explores how umami is constructed, how it behaves, and how layering ingredients creates a more complete and refined expression of savoury flavour.



Click Here: [Podcast-05-Umami.mp3](#)



Kitchen Haiku

Depth sits beneath taste
Layers build without weight or force
Flavour lingers on

This Week's Focus

Umami is a foundational system built through the presence and interaction of glutamates and nucleotides. It enhances perception, extends flavour, and creates a sense of completeness. Unlike immediate tastes, it develops progressively, often intensifying as the dish is eaten. It is most effective when layered—combining fresh, concentrated, and aged sources to build depth without imbalance.



Flavour Lens

Profile

Deep, savoury, rounded with lasting finish

Behaviour

Builds and accumulates, intensifies through reduction and ageing

Balance Role

Supports and extends flavour, anchors richness without heaviness

Key Pairings

Mushrooms, aged cheeses, tomatoes, stocks, fermented elements, proteins



Chef's Insight

Umami is not added—it is built, layer by layer, to create depth without weight.

Umami Chart

A reference of sources, application, and effect of Umami:

<https://chefsnotebooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/27-Umami-Reference-Chart.docx>



Kitchen Practice

Technique: Layer umami through multiple sources—fresh, dried, and aged ingredients

Timing: Build early through stocks and base ingredients; reinforce during cooking; refine at the finish

Common mistakes: Over-reliance on a single source, creating heaviness without balance

Professional approach: Combine natural glutamates with controlled fat and seasoning to create depth with clarity



Practical Applications

- Stocks, broths, and reductions
- Dried and rehydrated ingredients (porcini, tomatoes)
- Aged products (Parmesan, cured meats)
- Sautéing and caramelisation of mushrooms and proteins
- Layering multiple umami sources within a dish

Pairing Logic

- Fat (butter, oils): carries and rounds umami
- Acid (citrus, vinegar): lifts and prevents heaviness
- Herbs: add freshness and contrast
- Salt: enhances and reveals depth
- Starches (rice, pasta): provide a base to absorb and distribute flavour



A practical application of this week's flavour system

Mushroom & Parmesan Risotto with Thyme and Brown Butter

A deeply savoury risotto built on layered mushroom flavour, enriched with Parmesan and finished with nutty brown butter. Dried porcini stock intensifies the base, while fresh thyme lifts the richness, creating a balanced and elegant expression of umami.

Umami is most effective when built progressively. This dish demonstrates how layering ingredients creates depth while maintaining balance and elegance.



What This Dish Teaches

Umami is not created through a single ingredient—it is constructed through layering. Fresh mushrooms, dried porcini, and aged Parmesan combine to create depth, while butter carries and refines the flavour.

Recipe Link:

[Mushroom & Parmesan Risotto with Thyme and Brown Butter](#)



Build umami in layers—avoid relying on a single dominant source.
Balance depth with freshness to prevent heaviness.



Umami is not tasted immediately—it is understood over time.



Further Reading & Resources

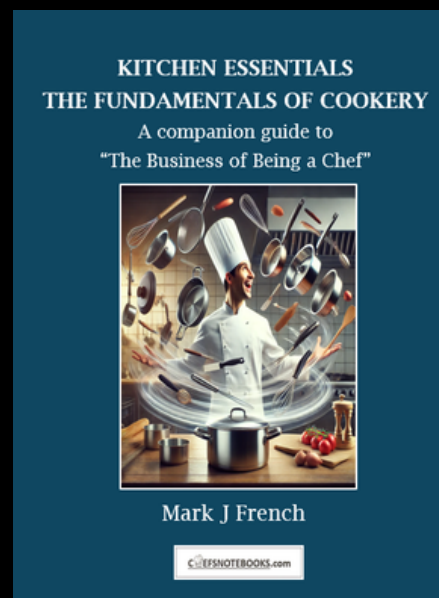
From the Library

See flavour balance charts and acidity mapping in the ChefsNotebooks archives.

Kitchen Essentials

The Fundamentals of Cookery

Beyond the techniques themselves, Chef French emphasises the importance of flavour development. He explores the five basic tastes, explains how to balance flavors, and stresses the crucial role of tasting throughout the cooking process. His passion for quality ingredients and wholesome menus shines through, encouraging readers to appreciate the natural flavours of food.



<https://chefsnotebooks.com/books>

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About the Author

Mark J French is a hotelier, chef, consultant, and author of several books on culinary arts and business. Based in the UK and Philippines, he blends classical training with global flavours.

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