

Q+A

with Le Cordon Bleu celebrity private chef and nutritionist Serena Poon

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Mirza Hasanefendic*



What inspired you to become a private chef and nutritionist?

My journey began with my heart and soul—my parents. During my senior year of college, my father was diagnosed with stage 4 liver cancer. It was a hereditary disease and the same thing his grandfather passed away from years before. At the time, I didn't even understand the reality of what his prognosis meant. He fought but lost a very painful battle after a year and three months. He was 48 years old. Two months later, my mother was diagnosed with a rare and extremely aggressive form of ovarian cancer. She was 45 years old at the time. So, before we even had a chance to grieve my father's passing, we were in another battle to save my mother who could hardly process the death of her soulmate, let alone her own mortality. With experimental treatment—and I believe, my father in heaven watching over her—my mother won her fight and is still with us today. As you can imagine, this completely changed my perspective on life. All that mattered to me now was the health and happiness of my loved ones.

During my father's battle with cancer, I began looking into holistic, herbal and natural remedies to alleviate the side effects of his treatments. Although I studied nutrition during college, this drove my passion even further. Instead of continuing on my path to law school, I decided to switch directions and go to Le Cordon Bleu. I wanted to study culinary arts so that I could create ways to heal and comfort people through the power of food. It was important to me that something good came from all that my father went through. My parents' story quickly became the

inspiration and driving force behind everything I did.

Although I was passionate about healing and providing nutritional education to others, I didn't realize the damage that the entire experience took on my heart, mind and body. I suffered painful post-traumatic stress, anxiety, survivor's guilt, shame and depression following my parents' battles with cancer. My motivation

to heal others was beginning to put my own health in jeopardy. After experiencing all of this, including multiple surgeries (two of which I nearly died from) and years of self-development, I've learned to balance my energy and take care of myself first.

During this time, my business also grew to include more than just culinary alchemy. I became a nutritionist, wellness expert, coach and counselor to my clients. As I became aware of the influence I had within my own community, I realized that I could effectively teach and help even more people by expanding my platform. Through the power of social media, I've been able to share my experiences and reach countless others. My philosophy for living an optimal healthy lifestyle is based on integrating nutritional and physical therapy, focused mindfulness and balancing the body's support system.

Tell us more about your new Just Add Water™ line and why you're excited about it.

Just Add Water™ is a vegan proprietary blend of yellow peas and sprouted grain protein, superfood fruit antioxidants, powerful super greens, prebiotics, probiotics, digestive enzymes and plant adaptogens.

The recipe has been carefully crafted with organic and natural products to be non-GMO and free of major food allergens, including dairy, gluten, wheat, rice, tree nuts and soy.

It's actually something that I've been making for my private clients for years. It's used particularly for traveling to help people maintain their daily nutrient intake, energy levels and weight. Our adrenals and microbiome are the core of our immunity, vitality and mental agility. All too often with clients, I've witnessed the effects of frequent traveling, overbooked schedules and inadequate nutritional self-care resulting in exhaustion, overstressed adrenals, immune decline and unhealthy weight fluctuations. I wanted to create a conveniently packaged superfood supplement that not only gives the body energy with the proper combination of protein, amino acids, vitamins and minerals, but also the right prebiotic, probiotic and digestive enzymes to effectively absorb them all. Not to mention, I also wanted it to taste great so that people would actually drink it!

After some of my clients' friends took notice of their healthy glow and energy at the Cannes Film Festival last year, I finally decided to put my dreams into action and share the benefits of my recipe with the rest of the world. Our slogan is "simplify your self-care" because that's exactly what Just Add Water™ helps to do. It's a one-step process to take care of yourself every day.

Is detoxing (of any kind) a regular practice for you?

I have always been a big believer of daily detoxing. I strongly encourage drinking warm lemon water first thing in the morning. I'm also a big fan of flooding your body with alkalizing and oxygenating greens in any way that you prefer. You can have it in juice form, fresh and raw, cooked, or in raw/dehydrated powders or capsules. Feeding your body with natural detoxifying plants and herbs helps to release the toxins, heavy metals, bacteria and waste we ingest on a regular basis. Daily intake of detoxifying foods also helps to keep the body functioning efficiently and effectively. It's also a good idea to do a deeper cleanse every so often, whether it's with raw foods or a juice cleanse followed by colonics or a fast.



Is self-care a must or optional for you?

At this point in my life, self-care is fundamental to my overall health and wellness. It's a big part of what I share and teach my clients, my tribe and my community. It took my most recent surgery to surrender to the fact that I am only human and need to put myself first. I realized quickly that my family, friends, business and clients would all be okay if I did.

Self-care is something that I practice daily. I like to start and end each day spending up to 20 minutes journaling and meditating. For me, self-care is also my morning ritual of daily elixirs followed by a matcha latte, or when I'm enjoying my Just Add Water™ drink. Beyond this, it's setting aside time to work out, get a lymphatic massage, practice yoga or honor my physical body several times a week. I practice self-care when I say "no" to social and work engagements because my body is telling me I need to rest, or when I nourish myself with quality products and foods. Self-care is also spending time by myself to breathe, ground and reconnect with my energy in my own space.

Words to live thoughtfully by?

"Honor your authentic voice and embrace your intuitive truth." We always know what we truly need in any given situation, whether it's for our health, mind, body, heart and soul. We too often silence our inner voice and juggle the needs of others with the imposed urgency and expectations of outcomes against what we know is right and best for ourselves. Honor your truth. You are incredibly powerful because no one else is *you*.

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