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By [Alex Vallis](#) 3 hours ago

José Andrés Talks Awards, Italy's Backwards Politics, And New Restaurants



Jose Andres

José Andrés, the now-stateside Ferran Adria protégé has been linked to the small-plates craze, molecular gastronomy, and is often considered Spain's culinary ambassador. This week, New York's [Vilcek Foundation](#) announced that judges Ruth Reichl, Dan Barber, Dana Cowin, and James Beard's Susan Ungaro picked Andrés (out of a no-contest lineup of immigrant chefs) to receive the group's annual award and \$50,000. It honors foreign-born individuals who make great contributions in the arts. We caught up with Andrés, and he told us how his next decade in America will be more deserving through political activism, why Italy is jealous of Spain, and the status on a New York venture.

What was your reaction to winning the Vilcek award?

I've just become 40. I'm closer to 50 than 30, but I feel like a young boy. When someone calls you and tells you won an award [it's exciting]. Now, I'm thinking about my contributions. I'm in very good company but it also puts pressure on whether you really deserve it. That's what I'm working on. The last 15, 20 years I spent a lot of time learning.

What's do you want to achieve in the next decade?

Now that I'm a father of three, I've been thinking about the contribution of chefs feeding people. I have 6 seats at minibar and seat 12 [a night]. Maybe chefs feed one percent of America. What happens with the other 99 percent? What are we not doing to help this country and the world one day to feed to our communities?

The farm bill is negotiated every few years. I've never seen a chef be a part of that. In the old days, you wouldn't see chef pressuring our congressman and politicians. If no one is inviting us, we should not be passive, we should be active and start knocking on the door.

There are many great people doing great things. Alice Waters, Bill Telepan, but we never had leadership from the top. And it's the first time it's happening right from the First Lady. Fighting against obesity is fighting to make sure our children will be better fed. An important percent of their intake happens at schools. I think it's really important to feed them right at the school level, making sure they are well fed in the right way. That gives them a chance to be productive. I think it's making sure to introduce food into the curriculum. **Through food we can explain history, through food we can explain science, through food we can explain social issues. Through food we can explore the world. The most important thing we do besides breathing is eating.**

Do you still consider yourself an immigrant?

I came the first time I came in 1990, when I was a sailor. **I came in a beautiful boat and sailed by the Statue of Liberty.** My daughters correct my English, in a good way. Carlota, was 7 or 8 and talking about Indian and Pilgrims and the Mayflower in school. She asked me "**Daddy are we immigrants or pilgrims?**" I think we have a tendency to forget. All my life I was an immigrant in Spain because I moved region to region. To me home is Washington, Bethesda. I have this double love. Spain the country born, and the United States, the country, I was received.

Why do you think you won this award? For your cooking?

[Laughs] My wife and my daughters tell me I cook very well, and some customers too. I'm a guy that I don't consider that I do anything really well. I like to do a lot of things. I get bored in one thing. I share with people what I know. I share in the office of Latin affairs; I serve as a chairmen. I try to be a good mentor, a good husband, a good father, a good friend. I try to bring a piece of Spain in America, what I appreciate. I know hundreds and thousands of others are doing the same every day.

Do you think there's a backlash for now molecular gastronomy?

Me, I don't call my cooking molecular. I use tomatoes, asparagus, eggs, and chicken; we don't know how to bring products from Mars so we don't use them. I use produce I feed my daughters.

What about Italy's new legislation attempting to ban molecular ingredients?

What is unbelievable is to try to take the attention that Spain is receiving, **why don't they take all the fast food restaurants out of Italy first, take all the sodas out of schools, or a piece of bread in the supermarket that has flour and 50 ingredients? What they are doing with this is stupidity. If we call soap by it's scientific name it would sound scary.** If she really meant business she wouldn't get into the business of food that reaches a very small percentage of people. Those products have been tested; we've been using them for 80 years. The problem is we use seaweed, salt, calcium? And calcium, the doctor recommends that. **Obviously this woman doesn't deserve to be the secretary of health.**

It's a lot of jealousy. It's making a war where there is no war; this is not a fight between traditional and modern. Everything traditional today, a 100 years ago was modern. I'm Christian but everyone will agree that the church misbehaved with Galileo. At the end of the day, there are more important issues. This isn't a problem it's a joke. We are banning the chefs, but the other 99 percent of the industry can keep using the ingredients? It's been approved by the European Union. **There's no issue. Very Italian. Italians like to show off and create nonsense controversy. Politics in Italy are some of the least respected in Europe.** If I can not use one of my ingredients because she's banning the fast food industry [that's one thing]. In the end of the day we're using seaweed and salt. It's nonsense. So I don't know what they're talking about.

When are you opening something in New York?

New York has been calling me for many years. It will be the right time. We're trying to see when we are opening the next restaurant. I don't have the space yet but **I'm working on an American concept restaurant for anywhere that we find the right place.** I open a restaurant as an intellectual approach to my work. I like to say I don't open restaurants to make money; I open restaurants to tell a story. I love to go to New York and see my friends and get inspired. I don't know when this opportunity will present itself. **It will happen before I'm 45.**

[The Vilcek Foundation \[Official Site\]](#)