Episode #3. Acclaimed French chef renounces his Michelin stars

One of France’s most celebrated chefs stunned the culinary world last week by asking the prestigious Michelin dining guide to take back the three stars awarded to his restaurant. Sébastien Bras, owner of Le Suquet in southern France, said he wanted to be “liberated from the pressure” that comes with holding one of the industry’s highest honors.

In a video posted to Facebook last Wednesday, 46-year-old Bras said he wanted “to give a new meaning to my life... and redefine what is essential.” Le Suquet has held the perfect three-star rating since 1999, when Bras’s father was the owner. Because Michelin inspectors visit unannounced, Bras explained, every one of his meals must be perfect to ensure he keeps his three stars. He indicated that being dropped from the guide would allow him to continue cooking without this worry.

Bras’s request was a first for the guide, though some three-star chefs have given up their stars by closing or radically changing their restaurants. Michelin’s executive committee has not yet said whether it would honor Bras’s request.

Chris: What’s the big deal, Emily? So he doesn’t want three stars. Why not just ignore the Michelin inspectors and cook the way he wants to cook? Why make a big announcement?

Emily: I don’t think it’s that simple, Chris. Being in the Michelin guide is a huge deal, especially in France. If the restaurant were to lose just one star, it could have an enormous impact on his business. That’s why Bras would rather be removed from the guide altogether.

Chris: So he gets to have less pressure and free publicity at the same time! I see how it works!...

Emily: He doesn’t have only himself to think about, Chris. His father worked hard to get those three stars. If the restaurant were to lose a star in the guide, it might hurt his father’s legacy. I understand Sébastien Bras’s decision.

Chris: Ugh! The whole thing is ridiculous. What’s the point of giving restaurants stars anyway? So that rich people can say they ate at some three-star restaurant? Aren’t there more important things to worry about?

Emily: I think we’re saying that we more or less agree. Bras is basically saying that by focusing on the Michelin stars, other things suffer. He wants to keep making high-quality food, but also to be able to enjoy his work.

Chris: I still don’t understand why he had to make this announcement. Why not just send the Michelin guide an email asking to be dropped?