# James Beard Awards 2024 chefs use fashion to celebrate heritage and identity



Even before accepting his award for Best Chef: Northwest and Pacific at the 2024 James Beard Awards, Gregory Gourdet stood out amidst the sea of traditional black-tie attire. His brightly coloured suit, inspired by the formal garb of the 1800s, paid homage to Haiti's liberation from French rule and featured the national bird, the Hispaniolan trogon. The jacket's intricate design showcased hand-stitched turquoise and blue ombre feathers, while a sophisticated red vest signified the bird's breast. Gourdet accessorised with a vintage Schiaparelli brooch, classic Gucci loafers, and a significant ring from a beloved friend’s late father, a good luck charm he had worn for previous nominations and victories. His unmistakable outfit reflected not only his unique style but also a deep narrative of identity and heritage.

“It’s important to remember the James Beard Awards are the biggest night we have for American culinary, and there is no better time to deliver a message than in that room and on that stage if you win,” said Gourdet, who collaborated with Portland-based designer Adam Arnold for his striking look. He emphasised that clothing serves as a powerful medium of expression, enabling chefs to communicate their identities and cultural backgrounds to a wider audience.

The James Beard Awards, often dubbed the “Oscars of the food world,” have evolved beyond mere awards ceremonies into platforms for culinary professionals to express their individuality and cultural pride through fashion. Distinct shifts have been noted in attendees' sartorial choices, moving away from traditional formalwear towards more expressive outfits. As Tamar Simpson, vice president of marketing and communications for the James Beard Foundation, observed, “We’re seeing more chefs and culinary professionals showcase their culture, heritage, personality, and artistic vision through their attire, especially on the red carpet.”

Among the noteworthy styles at this year’s ceremony was Masako Morishita from Perry's in Washington, D.C., who donned a modern kimono-style dress in a vibrant orange hue, intricately embracing both her Japanese heritage and contemporary fashion trends. “It was a way for me to express my identity without saying a word,” Morishita explained, underscoring her commitment to honouring her roots while reflecting her culinary journey.

Participation in the ceremony saw other chefs also infusing their outfits with cultural significance. Chef Serigne Mbaye of Dakar NOLA, representing West African heritage, wore a traditional outfit handcrafted by his tailor aunt, showcasing the pride and presence integral to African tradition. “Wearing that style in public to the Beards was more than just fashion. It’s a cultural expression,” he remarked thoughtfully.

This evolving representation reflects a broader ambition within the culinary community to challenge longstanding norms. Notably, the Beard Awards recently emerged from a period of scrutiny, having faced criticism following a lack of diversity among winners. The awards temporarily ceased during the pandemic, but since their return in 2022, they have introduced new governance measures to ensure a more inclusive selection process.

Fariyal Abdullahi, another rising star nominated for Emerging Chef this year, shared her own journey. She wore a traditional Harari garment symbolising her Ethiopian roots. Abdullahi expressed the complexities of her identity as a Black Muslim woman and first-generation immigrant, stating, “I wanted to proudly show up as all these voices.”

Completing this narrative of cultural expression, the 2024 ceremony also witnessed playful interactions among couples like Genie Kwon and Tim Flores, who have established a charming tradition of matching outfits. The duo's journey began with a pair of green jumpsuits in 2021, evolving into themed attire that not only sparked conversations but also highlighted their unique chemistry and shared culinary aspirations.

As the awards continue to evolve, culinary professionals are seizing the opportunity to illuminate their stories through attire, transcending the boundaries of traditional presentation. The ceremony stands as a celebration not only of culinary excellence but also of the myriad cultural backgrounds shaping the American food landscape.

This year, as chefs don garments that reflect their heritage and personal narratives, the James Beard Awards reaffirm their role as a platform for creativity, heritage, and community recognition.

### 📌 Reference Map:

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* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMitgFBVV95cUxNSExqcjY1YzNtSkwzTVFhNnAxTVFxczBvZVpuMk1UMVE5SkExZGVDWXVsd0I5clh3VlNjczlWVzFKRWN4WkNCR2hmQjJQb3NsTDFJUDI0Yl9SbV9QX3dPVTBtUGF1cmJrNEJSekh6d0ZYVkdtSlktY2F1d254UVU1TDlWNThNR2E4VUdxT0lkQS0yNTFSWUNoSmhXMnpYUVZnTDZhelZZQ0xqdzNwQ0N0WlRPZ0VKUQ?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en), [[5]](https://www.finedininglovers.com/article/james-beard-awards-2024-winners)
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* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.eater.com/2024/6/18/24181092/overheard-at-the-2024-james-beard-awards), [[7]](https://www.jamesbeard.org/index.php/blog/2024-best-chef-winners-community-impact)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMitgFBVV95cUxNSExqcjY1YzNtSkwzTVFhNnAxTVFxczBvZVpuMk1UMVE5SkExZGVDWXVsd0I5clh3VlNjczlWVzFKRWN4WkNCR2hmQjJQb3NsTDFJUDI0Yl9SbV9QX3dPVTBtUGF1cmJrNEJSekh6d0ZYVkdtSlktY2F1d254UVU1TDlWNThNR2E4VUdxT0lkQS0yNTFSWUNoSmhXMnpYUVZnTDZhelZZQ0xqdzNwQ0N0WlRPZ0VKUQ?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en), [[2]](https://www.axios.com/local/portland/2024/06/11/james-beard-winners-losers-food)
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* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMitgFBVV95cUxNSExqcjY1YzNtSkwzTVFhNnAxTVFxczBvZVpuMk1UMVE5SkExZGVDWXVsd0I5clh3VlNjczlWVzFKRWN4WkNCR2hmQjJQb3NsTDFJUDI0Yl9SbV9QX3dPVTBtUGF1cmJrNEJSekh6d0ZYVkdtSlktY2F1d254UVU1TDlWNThNR2E4VUdxT0lkQS0yNTFSWUNoSmhXMnpYUVZnTDZhelZZQ0xqdzNwQ0N0WlRPZ0VKUQ?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en), [[6]](https://www.eater.com/2024/6/18/24181092/overheard-at-the-2024-james-beard-awards)
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2. <https://www.axios.com/local/portland/2024/06/11/james-beard-winners-losers-food> - Portland's Kann restaurant and chef Gregory Gourdet achieved significant success at the 2024 James Beard Awards, with Kann winning Outstanding Restaurant and Gourdet being named Best Chef: Northwest and Pacific. Gourdet's attire at the ceremony featured a suit inspired by Haiti's national bird, the Hispaniolan trogon, symbolising his Haitian heritage. ([axios.com](https://www.axios.com/local/portland/2024/06/11/james-beard-winners-losers-food?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.jamesbeard.org/chef/gregory-gourdet> - Gregory Gourdet is a celebrated chef and restaurateur based in Portland, Oregon. He won the Best Chef: Northwest and Pacific award at the 2024 James Beard Awards for his work at Kann, a Haitian restaurant in Portland. Gourdet's culinary journey includes overcoming personal challenges and embracing his Haitian roots through his cuisine. ([jamesbeard.org](https://www.jamesbeard.org/chef/gregory-gourdet?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.axios.com/local/chicago/2023/06/06/james-beard-awards-red-carpet> - The 2023 James Beard Awards showcased chefs expressing their cultural heritage through attire. Notably, chef Serigne Mbaye of Dakar NOLA wore a traditional Senegalese outfit, reflecting his West African roots. This trend highlights the growing emphasis on cultural expression at the awards. ([axios.com](https://www.axios.com/local/chicago/2023/06/06/james-beard-awards-red-carpet?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.finedininglovers.com/article/james-beard-awards-2024-winners> - The 2024 James Beard Awards celebrated diverse culinary talents, with chefs like Gregory Gourdet and Valerie Chang being recognised for their contributions. Gourdet's win for Best Chef: Northwest and Pacific underscores the increasing appreciation for Haitian cuisine in the American culinary scene. ([finedininglovers.com](https://www.finedininglovers.com/article/james-beard-awards-2024-winners?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.eater.com/2024/6/18/24181092/overheard-at-the-2024-james-beard-awards> - The 2024 James Beard Awards highlighted chefs' reflections on their community impact. Gregory Gourdet expressed pride in representing Haitian culture and cuisine, emphasising the importance of sharing these stories through food. ([eater.com](https://www.eater.com/2024/6/18/24181092/overheard-at-the-2024-james-beard-awards?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.jamesbeard.org/index.php/blog/2024-best-chef-winners-community-impact> - The James Beard Foundation's 2024 Best Chef winners, including Gregory Gourdet, discussed their community impact. Gourdet highlighted the fulfilment derived from shining a light on Haitian cuisine and sharing its vibrant flavours with a broader audience. ([jamesbeard.org](https://www.jamesbeard.org/index.php/blog/2024-best-chef-winners-community-impact?utm_source=openai))