



Hair and makeup by Makeup Artist Jenny Patinkin; Styled by Eric Himel

Stephanie Izard wears: Rails tacket, Superga shoes, and Fallon choker, all from Neiman Marcus Michigan Ave, and Joe's jeans from Bloomingdales Michigan Ave

FEARLESS foodie

Iron Chef Stephanie Izard
Is More Than A Favorite
Chicago Culinary Talent—
She's Also One Of The
Windy City's Boldest Moms

Chicagoans have a lot of pride in their city, and there are countless reasons why—it's the home of the World Series-winning Chicago Cubs, deep dish pizza, and the birth place of President Barack Obama's career, just to name a few—but something that really delights the people of Chicago is being known as one of the country's best food cities. Named the "Best Restaurant City" by *Condé Nast Traveler*, it takes more than some delicious bites and trending Instagram-worthy hot spots to make a city known for its culinary influence—it takes dedicated, hard-working chefs using their talents to wow the world's taste buds to put a city's food scene on the map.

Enter Chicago chef, restaurateur, Iron Chef, and new mother Stephanie Izard.

Whether you know her as the first woman to win Bravo's "Top Chef" and be titled both winner and fan favorite in season 4, the newest chef to be named an Iron Chef on the hit Food Network show of the same name, or as the mastermind behind three favorite award-winning restaurants here in Chicago (Girl & the Goat, Little Goat Diner, and Duck Duck Goat), if you're a Chicago resident, then chances are that you've heard of Izard or, perhaps more likely, have tasted one of her dishes. The winner of the James Beard Award's "Best Chef: Great Lakes" in 2013 and Food & Wine Magazine's "Best New Chef" in 2011 has been an influencer on the Windy City's food scene for almost two decades, but she also has a deeper, more personal relationship with Chicago that goes back even further.

Having been born in Evanston, IL, and her entire family living out in the suburbs, when it came down to determining where to start her career as a chef and restaurateur, it was pretty obvious to Izard which city she should choose.

"I can't really envision having done this anywhere else, really. There is always the underlying tone of

competition, of course, but [the chefs here are] very supportive of each other and just want Chicago to be seen as the best restaurant city in the country, so we are very excited every time new restaurants open," Izard says. "I think everybody is just excited for each other."

When it comes to the inspiration behind Izard's three restaurants, it seems that she allows her restaurants to be influenced by

whatever inspires her in the kitchen—mainly her love of bringing tasty cultural dishes from all over the world to Chicago. "I enjoy the challenge of learning about different cultures and I enjoy cooking all sorts of different foods," Izard says.

While most Chicagoans can taste Izard's inspiration through her dishes, there is one thing that they may not know but have always wondered. Why do Izard's restaurants have a goat in their name? Right around the time that Izard won "Top Chef," she discovered that her last name had an interesting double meaning.

"It's a mountain goat that lives in the Pyrenees Mountains. If you look up Izard Mountain Goat you'll see a picture, it's more like a goat/antelope," Izard says. "Someone brought that up to me and I was like: 'That's cool. That should be in the name of my new restaurant.' My friend made the little symbol of the goat [that we use at all our restaurants] and [the goat] has kind of continued to turn into different things as the restaurants change, and now we have our own little mascot."

That was the beginning of Izard's "kids" becoming permanent fixtures in the Chicago food scene—her three goat-inspired restaurants and her son, Ernie. Izard and her husband, Gary Valentine, a beer consultant, welcomed 1-year-old Ernie in May 2016, and even after adding a new little member to her family, Izard shows absolutely no signs of slowing down in the career lane—despite the fact that there's a stereotype in the restaurant industry that female chefs have to choose success at work or a new baby at home.

"I remember years ago, right after "Top Chef," a fan wrote in a letter saying: 'Why aren't there as many women chefs?' And ["Top Chef" judge] Gail Simmons' answer was that a lot of women, when they get to that point in their career and they're going to be the head chef, it's sort of at the same time where they would maybe think of having a baby, so they have to make a choice and sometimes go for having a baby instead of becoming a chef. That always stuck in my head."

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for Izard though, balancing her culinary career and starting a family was all about timing and feeling she was in a comfortable place career wise before becoming a mother. “I was a little late to the game—I didn’t have my baby until I was 39. I just kind of snuck it in there before 40,” she says. “I ended up having him two months after opening the new restaurant, so I opened [Duck Duck Goat] when I was seven months pregnant.”

Now, just over a year later, Izard has discovered that her three restaurants are actually a great place for her son to grow and explore. “He goes to a day care school down the street [from the restaurants] and visits [them] in the middle of the day,” she says. “It’s sort of like he has this whole family—we have 350 employees at the three restaurants—so he gets to be around a lot of cool, different people. They pass Ernie around and everybody loves to hold him and he’s got so much love around him, and I think that’s really awesome.”

And one fun perk for baby Ernie of spending his formative years in the restaurant business? The little guy is growing up to be quite the adventurous eater!

“He’s already eaten brains and scallops and tuna, he’s a very well-eaten child. He loves the duck tongues because they’re crunchy,” Izard says proudly.

Yes, you read that correctly. While some parents can’t get their children to eat a chicken nugget without a fight, Ernie is feasting on brains and duck tongues. But can you blame him? Down the street from his day care, he has his mother’s three restaurants, all within a two-block radius from each other and each with their own distinct menus. Girl & the Goat, a high-end restaurant with a fun, family vibe known for serving up cultural dishes from all over the world, and Little Goat Diner, a nod to the classic diner inspired by her childhood on the East Coast, sit right across the street from each other on West Randolph Street. Izard’s newest restaurant, Duck Duck Goat, a Chinese restaurant inspired by a Chinese dinner she served for Sunday supper, opened in 2016 in West Fulton Market, just two blocks away from her other two restaurants.

It’s easy to assume that the son of a chef would easily skip over the picky eating stage no matter what, but Izard chalks it all up to a combination of a casual approach to parenting and some strange advice from Ernie’s doctor.

“We started with solid foods pretty young. I don’t remember the word for it, where you just give them a piece of broccoli when they’re like 6 months old and they gnaw on it. My doctor suggested that and I think it was a great thing to do, so he skipped the pureed food game and just went into eating real food even before he had actual teeth,” Izard recalls. “I tried it for the first time and Ernie was just gnawing on this piece of broccoli and I thought it was the coolest thing. We had had so much trouble getting him to eat the purees, sweet potato and things like that. [Now] anything we put in front of him he’ll at least put it up to his mouth.”

Izard’s advice for picky eating prevention? Don’t be afraid to let your little one start exploring food at a young age: “If you are cooking dinner for yourself,

“If you are cooking dinner for yourself, just give your baby what you’re eating. I feel like some people may be too afraid to let their child just try stuff.”

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Exploring, being adventurous, and facing life unafraid are all values that have served Izard well in her career and in her life, from quitting her job at age 27 to open up her first restaurant, Scylla (which closed its doors in 2007), to becoming the latest addition to the prestigious “Iron Chef” club, and these are the exact values that she and her husband want to instill in their son.

“I guess I am taking a more casual approach to parenting. We’re trying to have a regimented schedule as far as sleeping and things, but other than that, just letting him try different things and letting him not be so nervous about stuff,” Izard says.

While Izard is definitely one of the coolest, most laid back moms in Chicago, she does admit that striking a harmonious balance between work and family has been a challenge, but not an unsurmountable one. She and her husband, who both have pretty demanding daily schedules, work together to tackle parenting tasks and always make sure that Ernie is priority number one—which often means bringing him to work.

“Honestly, every week there is a new challenge. It’s definitely a juggling act and I’m sure it is for any working parents or even not working parents,” she says. “When I go on work trips, if it’s more than two nights, then I take Ernie along with me. Just to make sure I don’t miss anything. He’s in the phase where every day he is doing something new and cute and he’s about to take his first steps by himself, and I definitely don’t want to miss out on that. I think our parenting style is we make sure he comes before everything, but we are always working, so we just kind of bring him along.”



Stephanie Izard wears: Theory top, J Brand jeans, Frye shoes, all from Bloomington; Lana necklace from Neiman Marcus Michigan Ave

You could call Izard and her husband’s parenting philosophy Ernie-over-everything-else, and in that same vein, becoming a mother has also given her a lot of perspective: “I think that—and I’m sure this happens to a lot of parents—[becoming a parent] gives you the perspective not to get so upset about some of the little things and Ernie becomes the most important thing,” Izard says. “I would always put him before anything work related because he’s awesome. It just kind of gives you perspective that there are other things in life and just enjoying life is the most important thing. I think that was a lesson that I needed to learn.”

Izard combines her new life perspective with self-care, something she values greatly as a working mom with a 1-year-old son and a growing culinary empire. She makes sure to carve out time to take care of herself and hit the gym every morning—no matter what.

“I don’t think there is any way to make sure that you get enough sleep when you’re a parent of a young child. If anybody else’s husband is like mine, they’ve managed to just snore right through all of the late-night crying and stuff. Instead of just being tired all day, I make sure I try to get out of bed and go to the gym, even if Ernie had a rough night, because it’s the best way to start my day,” Izard says. “I think it is so important to make sure that you have some you time and remember that you are important also.”

In addition to taking some time every day to take care of herself, she also makes sure that she and Ernie have something they can do together, just the two of them. Their activity of choice: Swim lessons. Izard loves swimming, and considers it a win-win if

she can bond with Ernie while getting to do something that they both enjoy.

“Swim lessons are awesome—I want to make sure that he knows how to swim, and it seems like he really loves it so far,” she says. “I’m really into sports and I would love for him to get into sports as a child so he is out there doing active stuff instead of just sitting around playing video games.”

Though Izard describes her parenting style as casual, it’s clear that every parenting decision she makes, from encouraging Ernie to eat new foods to taking him to swim lessons, comes from a deep sense of purpose and an overall desire to see her son fearlessly explore the world around him as he grows up. This is yet another reason why Izard has chosen to raise her family and further grow her career in Chicago, a town she believe has the livability of a suburb and the diversity of a city, the perfect ingredients for a growing family.

“I think being in a place that is so culturally diverse and has so much going on will be great for him to learn so many things growing up,” she explains. “The same with having my restaurants here, I think it’s about the people that come into the restaurants and city itself has been very supportive of my career. It’s kind of cool, you feel like you have people on your team and you have people behind you.”

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT STEPHANIE IZARD AND HER RESTAURANTS, VISIT STEPHANIEIZARD.COM!