



Chef Stephanie Izard



As chef of Chicago restaurant Girl & the Goat, Stephanie Izard knows the key to a successful menu is using innovative ingredients. No stranger to culinary challenges – she won the fourth season of Top Chef – Izard’s menu is a tour de force of inventive dishes and unique ingredients. From broccoli-nectarine kimchee to pork fat doughnuts, Izard doesn’t shy away from unexpected flavor combinations, even pairing pork with seafood.

*Izard was named one of Food & Wine’s Best New Chefs 2011 and her restaurant snagged a nomination for the 2011 Best New Restaurant James Beard award, as well as being named “America’s Best New Restaurant” by Saveur Magazine. But all the acclaim hasn’t gone to her head; Izard can most often be found in the kitchen at Girl & the Goat. She is also releasing a cookbook in October titled *Girl in the Kitchen: How a Top Chef Cooks, Thinks, Shops, Eats & Drinks*, which is sure to inspire!*

We caught up with Stephanie to talk about brewing beer, her cookbook, and her popular “roasted pig face.”

NPB: Tell us about your restaurant?

Chef: Girl & the Goat opened in July 2010 in the West Loop of Chicago on Randolph and Halsted. The restaurant has a casual feel, with a 'rustic and badass' decor, friendly service and boldly flavored food with flavors from a variety of cultures and a focus on local ingredients.

NPB: What’s your earliest food memory? What made you decide to become a chef?

Chef: When I was around 8 years old my family and I went on a trip to Epcot in Orlando and visited the part of the park where you can eat “around the world.” I remember having crepes in “France” with a mushroom/cheese sauce and ham, which I of course loved. When we got

back from the trip I recreated the dish (using a cookbook to learn how to make a crepe), which I think threw my parents for a loop. From that point on I was in the kitchen with my mom cooking all of the time and I guess the rest is history.

NPB: You use pork as an ingredient across your menu. What about it makes it perfect in such a variety of dishes?

Chef: Pork comes in so many great cuts and has such great flavor and fat content that it works well in so many ways. Even when working with other meats, we often find ourselves reaching for pork and pork fat to enhance the flavor and richness.

NPB: Your menu features a lot of creative pork applications, from “roasted pig face” to pork fat doughnuts, and you’re even pairing pork with seafood. Where do you draw your inspiration?

Chef: We just try to have fun with the menu and draw inspiration from various cultures and



classic preparations that we then turn around and make our own. The “pig face” is a classic method of removing all of the flesh, fat and skin from the skull before braising (opposed to head cheese that is simmered off of the bone). We took the classic Italian idea and after a bit of practice made it into one of our most popular dishes. As for pork in desserts and pork with seafood... why not? Pork just makes everything taste better (or so we often say).

NPB: How do your patrons react to dishes like “pig face?”

Chef: I thought we would scare people off, but it turns out our guests are very adventurous so our dishes that contain hearts and tongues and pig faces are ordered with excitement to try new things.

NPB: Your menu changes frequently, based on seasonality and availability of ingredients. Why is using local ingredients important to you? How do you keep your menu fresh and creative?

Chef: It is very important to us to know where our food comes from, especially proteins. We try to get to every farm we support so we can see how the animals are raised and feel confident we are serving the best product available.

NPB: Is pork a profitable protein for your business?

Chef: Dishes like the pig face take a lot of preparation time, but the food cost is great (\$10 per head). I think chefs see pork as a valued item to serve on the menu because even the most expensive cuts like tenderloins and chops are very reasonably priced.

NPB: What is your favorite dish to cook with pork?

Chef: That is a tough one... I think our hiramasa crudo with fried pork belly lardons that are tossed in fish sauce alongside an aji aioli, caperberries and meyer lemon is on the top of my list. But the pork ribs are pretty darn tasty too.

NPB: You brew beer and blend your own wine. What beverages would you recommend when pairing with pork?

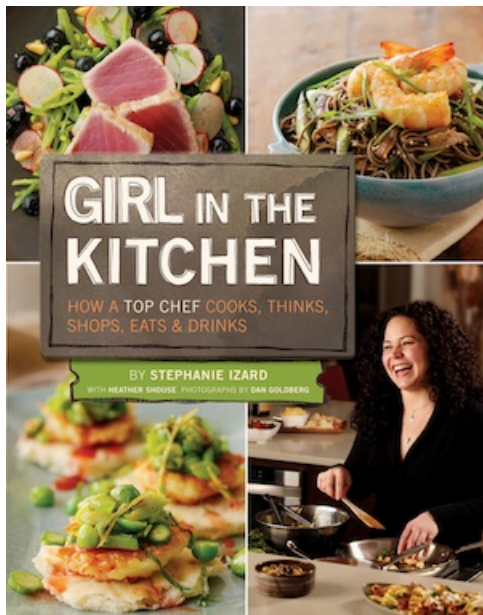
Chef: Pork can go with most anything. It can be prepared light enough to go with a variety of white wines and lighter beers... or when braised or smoked it can stand up to even the bigger reds and porter or stout style beers.

NPB: Girl & the Goat was named America's Best New Restaurant by Saveur magazine, nominated for Best New Restaurant 2011 by the James Beard Foundation and you were named one of Food & Wine's Best New Chefs 2011. What do you think sets Girl & the Goat and you as a chef apart?

Chef: Our number one goal is for our guests to have fun and I think with the atmosphere we have created (like a big party every night) and the great staff we have we are able to give the guests a unique and fun experience with flavors that are unexpected and new.

NPB: You are the first and only female chef to ever win Top Chef. What did it feel like to win, and what kind of doors did it open for you? How has your cooking changed or evolved since the competition?

Chef: Of course winning felt great... I have always been very competitive so anything else would not have gone over well. The best part is that it opens so many doors and presents you with opportunities that you can either pass up or take full advantage of. I think every chef's food changes and evolves for the better over time as they experience more things and travel and read and eat other chefs' foods. I still have dishes that I love that I made years ago, but I think for the most part I just keep evolving and trying new things.



NPB: Your first cookbook, *Girl in the Kitchen* comes out next month! Would you tell us a little about what inspired you to create it? What was the process like? Can you tell us about any recipes using pork?

Chef: I am very excited that my first book is finally hitting shelves. My friend Heather Shouse who is an extremely talented writer that has been writing for Time Out Chicago and Food & Wine magazine for years was looking to get into cookbooks. And it just seemed like us working together on both of our first projects would be a great way for us to learn the ropes on cookbooks. There is a lot of work that goes into it... recipe testing and writing all combined. When the final product came in the mail I just felt proud that we had created a book! The recipes are all simple and for the home cook including a peanut and pork ragout with halibut, a pork and apple sauce for pasta, and a coconut and pork shoulder stew for a cold winter day.

NPB: Any plans for another restaurant?

Chef: We are currently working on 'the little goat', a diner in the west loop slated to open in March of 2012.