

Navigator / FOOD



Sandwich shop Middle Child in Washington Square West

## The Next Course

Millennials are starting to own restaurants in Philly. So yeah—everything is about to change.

by ALEX TEWFIK

In Philly, restaurant trends have their time and place. Take 2013, when every local bakery started serving its own version of the New York crenut. Or when bacon went from a burger topping to a chocolate-covered snack to a candle scent in the span of a year. Restaurant fast fashion.

But there are trends that evolve into movements—that shift the way we think about

dining altogether. Like the farm-to-table crusade, or small plates, or the way craft beer went from home garages to beer bars to every tap. Or the one we're experiencing right now: Millennials are opening restaurants in Philly. For better or worse, it's going to change this city forever.

The evolution is not very physical; it's more about a specific sort of energy. You can feel

when you're in a millennial-owned restaurant (or at least I can, as a millennial myself). There's a sense of vibrancy and experimentalism that's inventive and performative. (So millennial, right?) If the boomer generation defined the last four decades of restaurant culture—that a chef had to have spent time in fancy kitchens; that the restaurants worth talking about had to be "ambi-

tious"; that big-production dining is the only thing that counts—the millennials are dismantling that definition.

This might be uncomfortable for some. The dining room at Royal Izakaya is nearly pitch-black, with '90s Pokémon projected on the walls. That's just the right vibe for high-end Japanese food, at least from a millennial's perspective: stripped-down, nostalgia-laden elegance. Maybe it's strange that Res Ipsa Cafe, one of the best Italian restaurants, operates inside a coffee shop—but who said hand-made pasta has to come from a formal restaurant? If you recalibrate the way you judge "the best," you'll see that the fluff of Middle Child's egg sandwich is as worthy of adulation as a seven-course tasting menu. We prioritize hyper-focused concepts over hyper-ambitious ones. We value authenticity and craft, not which culinary school the chef went to.

And I know you think it's strange that the red wine your niece ordered at dinner is unfiltered and dank. But that's the thing. The wine is supposed to taste like that. It's *glou glou*, a term we co-opted to describe natural wine. A *New York* magazine story calls *glou glou* "a maddening form of luxury, one that simultaneously rejects and performs elitism." And you know what? Millennials love to walk that tightrope, be it in art, business or entertainment.

But especially in their restaurants.

### BREAKING BREAD WITH ...

#### Jose Garces

Philly's Iron Chef makes his return with a brand-new restaurant in Bucks County.



**We opened Stella because ...** I've had a farm in Ottsville, about 25 minutes from New Hope, since 2010. I grew organic vegetables and really embraced the Bucks County lifestyle and the community. For me, that place was a sanctuary. **We've made some big changes this year, including ...** updating every single menu in all of our restaurants. It was a pretty big undertaking. **Returning to cooking ...** was exciting. I was focusing on business matters for some time, but as a creative person, I had a lot of pent-up food ideas that had been circulating in my head. **Stella's menu is ...** 20 dishes that we just felt captured the American spirit, from spaghetti pie finished with warm truffle cream to vegetable fried rice with kimchi and a fried duck egg. **This business is ...** an ever-evolving learning experience, and I think that's kept me going for so many years. **Next, we're focusing on ...** all of our existing brands and concepts in Philadelphia, down the Shore, and in New York. Our plate is full. If I've learned anything, it's to just stay focused. —R. F.S.

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES BUTLER

BREAKING  
BREAD WITH ...

## Jose Garces

Philly's Iron Chef makes his return with a brand-new restaurant in Bucks County.



158

PHILADELPHIA • SEPTEMBER 2019

**We opened Stella because ...** I've had a farm in Ottsville, about 25 minutes from New Hope, since 2010, I grew organic vegetables and really embraced the Bucks County lifestyle and the community. For me, that place was a sanctuary. **We've made some big changes this year, including ...** updating every single menu in all of our restaurants. It was a pretty big undertaking. **Returning to cooking ...** was exciting. I was focusing on business matters for some time, but as a creative person, I had a lot of pent-up food ideas that had been circulating in my head. **Stella's menu is ...** 20 dishes that we just felt captured the American spirit, from spaghetti pie finished with warm truffle cream to vegetable fried rice with kimchi and a fried duck egg. **This business is ...** an ever-evolving learning experience, and I think that's kept me going for so many years. **Next, we're focusing on ...** all of our existing brands and concepts in Philadelphia, down the Shore, and in New York. Our plate is full. If I've learned anything, it's to just stay focused. —R. F. S.

**Outlet:** Philadelphia Magazine  
**Print Circulation:** 852,425