

Iron Clad: Q & A with Cat Cora

Written by Interview by Melissa Larsen

Thursday, 27 July 2017 12:33 - Last Updated Thursday, 27 July 2017 12:42



As one of the top chefs in America, Cat Cora lends new meaning to “cat got your tongue?” Cora is the first female Iron Chef on Food Network’s “Iron Chef America,” is a proud mom of six and has opened more than 18 restaurants around the nation and globally, among other accomplishments on her full plate. Here, the culinarian gives a sneak peek of her newest opening, offers tips for handling the upcoming holiday season and dishes on her family’s fondness for sushi.



AFM: Have you visited Arizona?

CC: I love Arizona! Love the desert, love the mountains. And the food is amazing. Just a really beautiful state.

AFM: Would you consider opening one of your award-winning restaurants in Arizona?

CC: Of course I would in a heartbeat!

AFM: What can diners expect at your newest restaurant, Fatbird Southern Kitchen and Bar?

CC: Some of the best Southern food they can find! It's a homage to my Southern roots. My family's fried chicken and biscuit recipes as well as my grandmothers to-die-for Bourbon bread pudding. So many delicious, elevated soul food dishes, a cool vibe and amazing service. It's in a legendary location in the Meatpacking District [in New York City]—a one-of-a-kind experience.

AFM: From your perspective as a diner, what makes a restaurant successful? What about from the perspective as a chef?

CC: The food has to be delicious and consistent. Service has to be impeccable as well as beverage service. The menu has to be tight, and the diner has to be able to enjoy the flow of reading the menu, ordering, service and dining. There also has to be a healthy culture created in the restaurant.

AFM: Is there a type of restaurant you have yet to open that is on your wish list?

CC: I am opening them as we speak: craft burgers, Southern fried chicken and biscuits, Mediterranean, a gastropub and several others, so I am happy. But there is always some creative juices going on in my brain and my business partner/girlfriend Nicole is a genius in creative, so we are always creating the coolest projects.

AFM: Out of all of your titles (chef, author, host, etc.), is there one that means the most to you?

CC: Yes: ‘Mom.’ It encompasses all my titles.

AFM: As a mom of six, how do you get your kiddos to take part in cooking?

CC: We don't have to try hard; they all love food. As a matter of fact, they all love sushi so I have to work an extra job to support eight of us eating sushi once a week. And they all want to help in the kitchen and love eating!

AFM: What ingredients should at-home chefs experiment with now that the fall season is upon us?

CC: Definitely amazing root vegetables like parsnips, a variety of potatoes and roasted acorn or butternut squash.

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AFM: Any tips for handling busy holiday dinners?

CC: Plan ahead, make a list, shop ahead and prep ahead so the day of your get-together, you can have fun and enjoy the party.

Fast Favorites...

- Cereal: Kashi cereals
- Pizza topping: All veggies—yummy!
- Midnight snack: Hummus for sure, any flavor on anything
- Ice cream flavor: Butter pecan
- Bottle of wine: Definitely pinot noir Central Coast or Oregon

To Learn More

Cat Cora catcora.com.