

# Lexus Culinary Master Stephanie Izard: On the Radical Act of Joy

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There is nothing hurried about a dish that delights.

The crisp of a perfectly browned crust; the quiet patience of a simmering stock; the way a sauce waits for just the right moment to be whisked into silk. Each step defies the pace of the world outside the kitchen. To choose that kind of care is, in its own way, a radical act.

Chef Stephanie Izard — James Beard Award winner, “Top Chef” champion, and Lexus Culinary Master — has built her life on that defiance. Joy, for her, isn’t an afterthought or a garnish; it’s the main ingredient.

“Food is just beautiful,” she says. “When you start with the best ingredients, it goes beyond looks. You find yourself asking: How does it taste? How does it feel? Does it make you smile?”

That smile-as-a-benchmark runs through everything she touches, including her seven restaurants bearing the goat moniker (a playful translation of her surname in French). It’s what sends guests home grinning after a late-night dessert and what connects her to Lexus, where craftsmanship and joy both leave a lasting impression. Craft, she believes, is universal; joy is the proof of its success.

But before the accolades, before the seven restaurants across Chicago, Los Angeles and Sunnyvale, and before becoming a Lexus Culinary Master, there was a family table. It was there she built a philosophy around curiosity without borders.

### **An American in Paris (Epcot)**

Izard’s love of cooking took root early in Stamford, Connecticut where she grew up. Her mother, an avid cook with hundreds of cookbooks, turned every Sunday into a master class in planning and collaboration. Stephanie and her sister pored over recipes, made grocery lists and cooked side by side with her, learning not just technique but the quiet pleasure of feeding others.

One memory still shines: After tasting a ham-and-cheese crêpe at Epcot’s “Paris,” eight-year-old Stephanie returned home, grabbed a cookbook to learn the basics of crêpes, and recreated the rest from memory. “That was the first time I was just in the kitchen, going for it by myself,” she recalls. From that point on, fearless experimentation became second nature.

Her upbringing blurred cultural lines long before the word “fusion” was trendy.

“Growing up, we had food from Japan, different parts of Europe, Mexico —everywhere, really. I just thought that’s how everybody’s families ate.”

That confidence in blending influences would later become a hallmark of her style; a sort of “moveable feast” where borders blur and flavors linger at the table.



### **Halibut, Goat Fat and Cereal — Oh My!**

The freedom and exploration in Izard's early years fueled the playful sophistication of her menus today. "I think it's ever evolving," Izard explains.

She delights in unexpected harmony: for instance, a halibut paired with miso-Marcona almond butter and blueberry jam n??c ch?m that "almost tastes like peanut butter and jelly."

Collaboration adds another spark. At the Aspen Food & Wine Festival, she joined fellow Lexus Culinary Master Shota Nakajima to create poke crowned with goat-fat chili crunch and a shower of Special K cereal.

“Every bite that you took was an adventure,” she says. Guests even lined up for seconds: a reminder that surprises can be (and often are) delicious.

Her home life in Los Angeles also inspires innovation in the restaurant. Frequent hot-pot nights with her son led to the creation of a Ginger-Chili sauce. Within weeks, it found a home in all seven of her restaurants.

“We turned it into a vinaigrette, a hot sauce. We even made a crêpe filling. It honestly found its way onto every menu.”



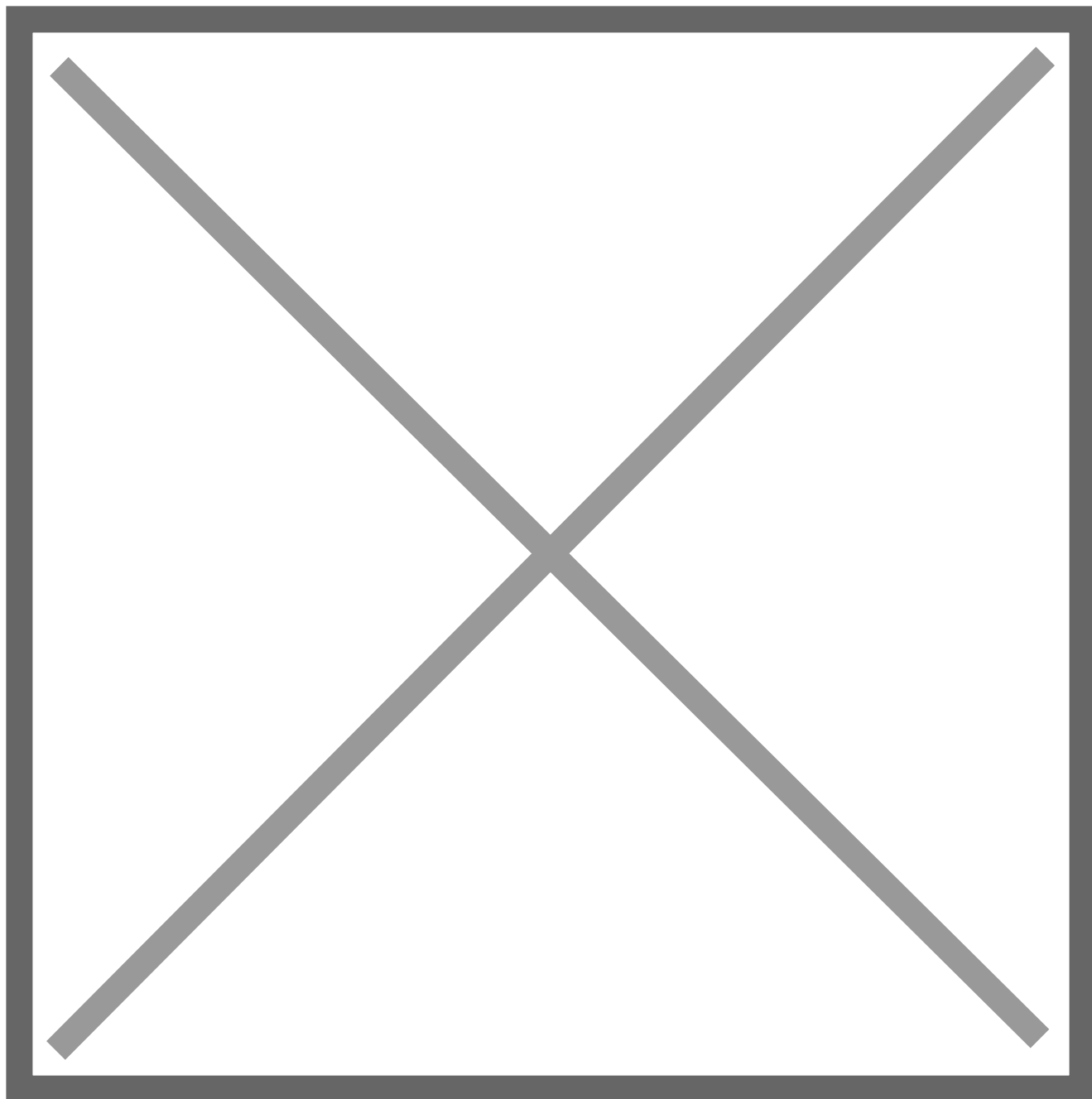
### **A Shared Pursuit of Perfection**

Be it staff meals or brand partnerships, Izard gives the same respect to those around her as she does to a signature entrée: nothing wasted, nothing half-hearted. After “Top Chef,” she once accepted a sponsorship she didn’t believe in and vowed never to do so again. So, when Lexus Culinary Masters and chef friends Jon Shook and Vinny Dotolo praised Lexus, she paid attention.

All it took was one test-drive in a Lexus to convince her. “I was floating on a cloud,” she remembers. That relationship deepened when she competed in several Lexus-sponsored culinary events and began driving the

family's green Lexus GX — affectionately nicknamed “the G-Rex” by her son.

At Lexus culinary events today, she aims to create “the most memorable bite of the weekend,” pairing flavor and memory with the elegance of the cars on display. She loves that guests associate a taste of her cooking with the sight of a new Lexus. It's evidence that craftsmanship, whether culinary or automotive, can create a lasting sensory imprint.



### **Smiles are the Standard**

Running seven restaurants across three cities requires more than recipes; it demands trust and culture.

“Cooking is a team sport,” Izard says. “Some chefs who have been working with me for a long time will play around with dishes while I’m not in that city,” she says.

Though she’s come far from theme park crêpes, Izard still finds herself experimenting with new spice blends or making her son’s favorite pepperoni-and-sweet-corn fried rice — a go-to meal you can “take in a different direction every day and never get bored.”

Granted, Izard doesn’t strike you as someone who gets bored. Whether it’s sharing a family meal, collaborating with another chef or sliding into the driver’s seat of her Lexus GX, Izard often arrives at the same destination: a place of joy and authenticity.

“Appreciate the good things in life,” she says. “We all work hard to be able to dine at great restaurants and drive beautiful cars. But it’s more than luxury — it’s about the smile, the memory and the pride in doing something truly well.”