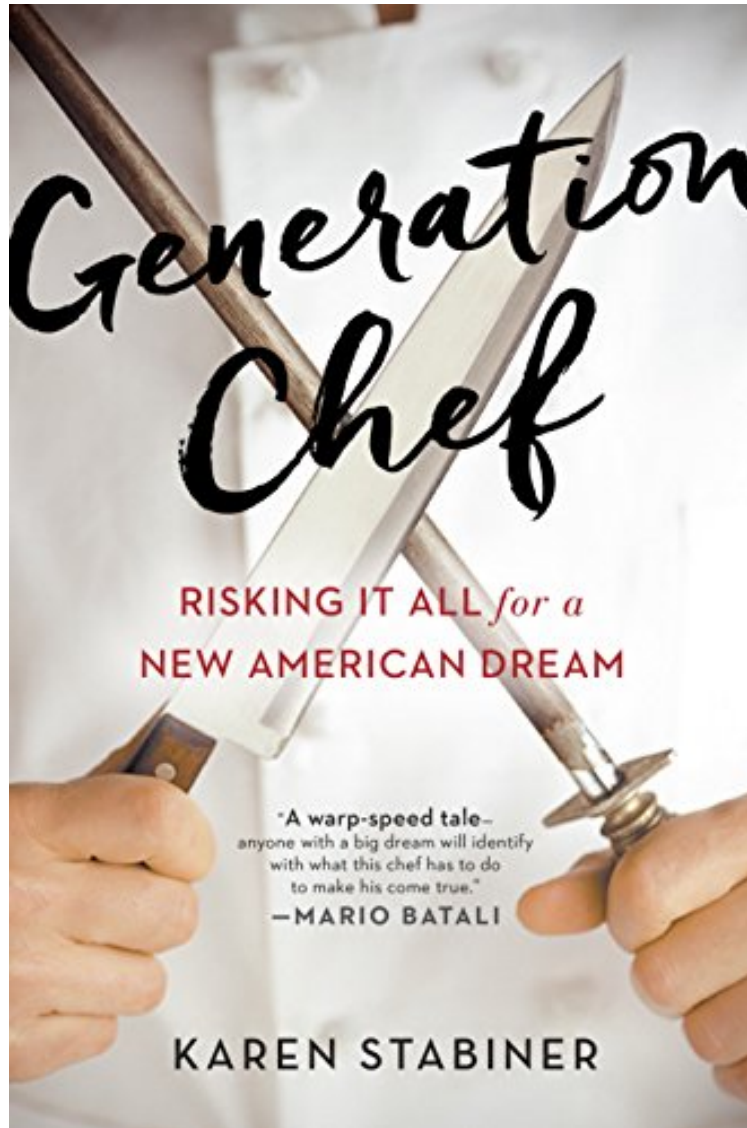


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## Generation Chef: Risking It All for a New American Dream

*Karen Stabiner*

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**Karen Stabiner : Generation Chef: Risking It All for a New American Dream** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Generation Chef: Risking It All for a New American Dream:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The real story of one chef's journeyBy LGregoryI am a big Food Network fan and this book takes you even deeper into the world behind the counter of the restaurant industry. The story flows as an emotional roller coaster of big dreams and real worries. It's also exciting to have this insight since I've eaten at Huertas, the restaurant featured in the book. The author experiences the whole story under a microscope and really succeeds in sharing the best details with her readers. Recommended for anyone who loves reading about

food and the food industry. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good read By Kristen Interesting read especially for someone in the restaurant business or interested in the business. Book was a bit disjointed at times but overall good. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Two Stars By caroline scandura I really enjoyed this look at the professional chef!

Inside what life is really like for the new generation of professional cooks—a captivating tale of the make-or-break first year at a young chef's new restaurant. For many young people, being a chef is as compelling a dream as being a rock star or professional athlete. Skill and creativity in the kitchen are more profitable than ever before, as cooks scramble to reach the top—but talent isn't enough. Today's chef needs the business savvy of a high-risk entrepreneur, determination, and big dose of luck. The heart of *Generation Chef* is the story of Jonah Miller, who at age twenty-four attempts to fulfill a lifelong dream by opening the Basque restaurant Huertas in New York City, still the high-stakes center of the restaurant business for an ambitious young chef. Miller, a rising star who has been named to the 30-Under-30 list of both *Forbes* and *Zagat*, quits his job as a sous chef, creates a business plan, lines up investors, leases a space, hires a staff, and gets ready to put his reputation and his future on the line. Journalist and food writer Karen Stabiner takes us inside Huertas's roller-coaster first year, but also provides insight into the challenging world a young chef faces today—the intense financial pressures, the overcrowded field of aspiring cooks, and the impact of reviews and social media, which can dictate who survives. A fast-paced narrative filled with suspense, *Generation Chef* is a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at drive and passion in one of today's hottest professions.

"*Generation Chef* is as appetizing a start-up tale as a plate of bite-sized Basque pintxos served up by protagonist chef Jonah Miller." —*Financial Times* "You'll gobble up this delicious behind-the-scenes account of a start-up restaurant in New York City... This book is as much about dreams and passion as it is about food." —*Star Tribune* Karen Stabiner's *Generation Chef* is a model of great reporting and great storytelling on a subject that remains endlessly fascinating. A young cook putting everything on the line to pursue the one dream that matters to him, cooking for people in the toughest restaurant city in the world. The chapters leading up to and following the *New York Times* critic's visits are worth the price of admission. I truly admire this book. —Michael Ruhlman, author of *The Soul of a Chef* and *Ruhlman's Twenty* "Generation Chef is then a warp-speed tale of passion on a plate, a frank inside look at a twenty-six year old chef who opens his first restaurant. Karen Stabiner has a sharp eye for the story inside the story — anyone with a big dream, whether it's food or something else, will identify with what this chef has to do to make his come true." —Chef Mario Batali, chef, author, philanthropist "Stabiner has done more than tell the riveting story of one young chef on the cusp of stardom; she's plunged us right into the bubbling epicenter of a culinary moment like no other. Witty and well-observed, *Generation Chef* isn't just a book for New Yorkers or for the food-obsessed; it's for anyone anywhere who loves a great read." —Tom Colicchio, Chef/Owner *Crafted Hospitality*, Head Judge *Top Chef* Karen Stabiner gives readers a corner table from which to observe the journey of today's entrepreneur. Although its stories are rooted in restaurants, *Generation Chef* and the lessons it contains are an invaluable resource and reference for anyone with a start-up dream. —Danny Meyer, CEO *Union Square Hospitality Group* and author of *Setting the Table* "A deftly written look at the high stakes, low glamour back story of launching a restaurant. Deeply insightful, this is a must-read for culinary school grads or anyone getting into the industry." —Kathleen Flinn, author of *The Sharper Your Knife, the Less You Cry* and *Burnt Toast Makes You Sing Good* About the Author Karen Stabiner is a journalist and author of narrative non-fiction. She has co-authored the cookbooks *Family Table*, a collection of staff meal recipes and backstage stories from Danny Meyer's *Union Square Hospitality Group* restaurants, and *The Valentino Cookbook* with Piero Selvaggio. Her feature articles and essays have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, as well as in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Saveur*, *Travel Leisure* and *Gourmet*. Her work has appeared in *Best Food Writing* anthologies. Stabiner teaches at the *Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism*. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. OPENING NIGHT Jonah Miller bounded up the steep narrow stairs, each tread worn at the center from more than a century of use, the only reminder that this place had ever been anything but his. In fifteen minutes, when the doors opened for the first time, it would be Huertas, a Spanish restaurant that had the twenty-six-year-old chef almost \$700,000 in debt before he sold his first beer—on paper, at least, as restaurant investors knew how bad the odds were of repayment, let alone profit, anytime soon. Everything but the stairs was new, a practical compromise between the dream Jonah had carried in his head since he was sixteen and the realities of building codes and water lines and oven vents and his partner's input and, always, the budget. He had managed to erase the storefront's past as a pizza place that simply stopped paying rent and gave the keys back to the landlord, a Korean place that preceded it in failure, and before all that, a vague something else. Now all he had to do was not fail as his predecessors had, in a business where it happened all the time. Jonah was ten pounds lighter than usual on an already beanpole frame, skinny enough to catch his mother's

attention and inspire his fiancée to make sure there was always takeout in the refrigerator for a late-night meal. His professional kitchen philosophy boiled down to “keep your head down and do the work,” and he wasn’t a screamer like some chefs, so the stress of opening his first restaurant turned inward, instead, and eroded his appetite. He referred to the space that way, as his first restaurant, because there was no chance he’d stop at one. At six foot two, he developed a slouch in deference to kitchen soffits that might want to knock him in the forehead or coworkers who preferred eye contact to staring at his chin. He was, he said, too tall to be a chef—which made him laugh, because he had never really wanted to be anything else. The slump was part of an overall concession to the fact that cooking always came first. Jonah had gone to the same East Village barbershop for the last five years for a \$15 adult version of a kid’s buzz cut, because it spared him having to make aesthetic decisions or to engage in mindless conversation with someone who considered himself not a barber but a stylist. He had no tattoos, even though they were as ubiquitous as clogs in a restaurant kitchen. He wore anonymous dark cotton pants that were baggy enough to be comfortable on a fifteen-hour shift, and equally nondescript T-shirts and hoodies; no outlier colors or styles that required him to devote conscious thought to what he put on in the morning. His shoes were broken in and built for comfort. What stood out was his new chef’s shirt, blindingly white, its creased short sleeves not yet softened into shape by repeated washings. Jonah could have worn a more formal and more expensive double-breasted chef’s coat, embroidered with “Huertas” and “Executive Chef Jonah Miller,” but he chose the same shirt that the cooks and dishwasher and porter wore, and told them not to call him “Chef.” Better to lead by example, he figured, than to insist on respect before he’d shown them what he could do. Hierarchy didn’t mean anything. He was going to earn their admiration. He checked the inanimate objects that hadn’t budged since the last time he looked, because he had to have something to do: a large Spanish ham on a metal skewer set into a wooden frame; little mismatched vintage dishes, one of Maldon salt and one of lemon wedges; a canister of tasting spoons; a metal spindle to hold completed order tickets; a jury-rigged rail that wouldn’t last the week, to hold tickets that were still in play. He checked the fill level on his squirt bottle of olive oil, retied his long apron, and refolded and retucked a towel at exactly the right position on that apron tie, just behind his left arm. He walked back past the roast and sauté station and the fry station, peered inside the refrigerated drawers at the mixed greens and portioned proteins, and headed up to the wood-burning oven to survey the prep work of the one cook Jonah couldn’t see. The oven had been there when he leased the space and he wasn’t about to spend money to move it, so they’d ended up with a bathroom between it and the kitchen. Until everything was running smoothly, he’d shuttle back and forth to keep an eye on things. While he was up there, he reviewed the glass jars of citrus wedges that sat on the bar, to make sure they looked good enough to suit him. Jonah had played high school baseball, starting out as a pitcher until a chipped bone in his shoulder exiled him to shortstop and third base, and the pitcher’s habit of minuscule last-minute adjustments—once the microscopic repositioning of fingers on the ball, now the equally fine placement of a knife on a cutting board—had stayed with him. It was a nice, familiar way to dissipate some of the tension. If Jonah was right—and he had bet his professional future that he was—Huertas was exactly what a healthy range of people were looking for, from the East Village millennial crowd that cruised First Avenue to serious diners old enough to be their parents, to neighborhood residents looking for a regular haunt. He was going to serve them Basque food because he loved it and because it had newness going for it, offered in two distinct formats that gave people a range of choices, from a drink and a snack to a multicourse meal. In the front room, where he expected the younger crowd to gather, he’d serve pintxos, little one-bite appetizers that would fly by on trays like dim sum, an endless array of impulse purchases served with Spanish beers and wines and traditional drinks like the kalimotxo, which was red wine and Coca-Cola. The pintxo list led off with the gilda, named for Rita Hayworth’s character in the 1946 film *Gilda*, a skewered white anchovy curved around a manzanilla green olive at one end and a guindilla pepper at the other. There would be some type of croqueta, jamón or mushroom or fish, depending on what he had on hand, and a slice of bread topped with egg salad and a single shrimp—which might not sound as good as it tasted but was going to look alluring enough to get people to take a chance. He could build a pintxo around a chunk of octopus or some homemade sausage; the point was to have a half dozen every day, and to change the list frequently, so that repeat customers had to start all over again once they got past the gilda, which would always be on the menu, no matter what else he made. He would offer conservas, tins of Spanish seafood—Spain put its best seafood into tins—and serve them with bread, aioli or lemon or pickled peppers, and homemade potato chips. There would be a few raciones, mid-sized plates, but for the most part the front room was a place to drink and snack and chat, either at the bar or at a table or standing up, which was what people did in Spain. The dining room at the back was for what he called the menu del día, four courses, pintxos through dessert, with choices for the entrée and dessert. Jonah planned to change some portion of that menu every week, at least, to keep people coming back for what qualified as a fine-dining bargain by New York City standards—a \$52 fixed-price menu, with wine pairings at \$28. His signature dining-room dish was the egg course, huevos rotos, or “broken eggs,” which summed up what he was trying to do—have fun with refined, reconsidered versions of Spanish classics. He’d tried the original at a Basque place in Madrid, a fried egg plopped on top of a batch of fried potatoes with a

side of chorizo or chistorra sausage or jamoacute;n. Jonahr's version had only the basic ingredients in common with the original. He used a hand-crank machine to spin an impaled russet potato into strands as slender as spaghetti, which he flash-fried, dressed with a chorizo vinaigrette, and topped with a slow-poached egg and slivers of fresh scallions. As soon as the soft egg broke, it turned the vinaigrette into a richer sauce.