

Colin McKaharay – Personal Biography

Most kids grew up on cartoons. I grew up on bad food and great chefs. My mother's cooking was so bad it became legendary—pork roasts that doubled as lumber. If I wanted to eat well, I had to do it myself. While my siblings watched Sesame Street, I was busy with *The Frugal Gourmet* and Julia Child, getting cookbooks autographed before I could even read them.

My first dish? A backyard delicacy I called Caterpillar Soup, whipped up in a stolen blender. I also learned how ovens worked by hiding my Fisher-Price cookware inside them. My dad eventually got me a job washing dishes at 14, and by 16 I had my first pro knife set—starting with a Chinese cleaver, thanks to an early obsession with Martin Yan. That cleaver lit the fuse.

I became one of the early pioneers of the custom kitchen knife movement in the 2000s, forging relationships with American bladesmiths at a time when few chefs cared where their steel came from. Over time, I built what was considered the largest private collection of custom kitchen knives in the country, and possibly the most extensive collection of cleavers—custom and antique—dating back over a century. I don't just use them—I understand them, maintain them, and still make a few by hand today.

After graduating from the New England Culinary Institute, I trained under Charlie Trotter in Chicago, and then at a then-obscure place in Napa called The French Laundry. I finished my education down south with a B.F.A. in Graphic Design—juggling kitchens, college, karate, and BBQ competitions. Yes, the “Yankee” won a few of those too.

I made my way back to Long Island as Executive Chef at Dockers Waterside Café, where I led the kitchen for over a decade, building prestige while staging at places like Per Se, Lespinasse during the off-season. Then came my full-time move to NYC to join Gordon Ramsay at The London, where we earned two Michelin stars during my tenure—making it the fifth Michelin-starred restaurant I contributed to.

When Ramsay left the hotel, I took a hard pass on Vegas and instead moved east—to Blackstone Steakhouse, where I've spent the last 10+ years.

Blackstone was already a success when I arrived, but it leaned on minimal technique—a “steak on a plate” kind of place. I kept the classic steakhouse identity intact but layered in thoughtful execution, exotic beef programs, and polished high-volume systems. We became one of the first restaurants on the East Coast certified to serve authentic Kobe beef, and I launched our Cadbury Wagyu and bourbon-aged Wagyu programs.

Under my leadership, Blackstone has evolved into one of the most talked-about and highest-grossing restaurants in New York—if not the country. It runs like a high-pressure machine. My kitchen is a proving ground: cooks become sous chefs, and sous chefs go on to run their own kitchens. I train hard, but I lead from the front.

Beyond daily service, I introduced high-concept, high-profit events: Kobe dinners, reinvented beefsteak feasts, and wine or whiskey pairing experiences, all on off-nights to drive revenue into the slower part of the week. I was invited on a luxury Mediterranean culinary cruise to teach classes and custom dinner services for their extremely exclusive VIP guests.

There's more to come. But for now, I'm still standing at the pass, sharpening blades, perfecting the plate, and doing what I've done since I was a kid dodging baked plastic pans—staying sharp, staying hungry, and building something bigger than myself.