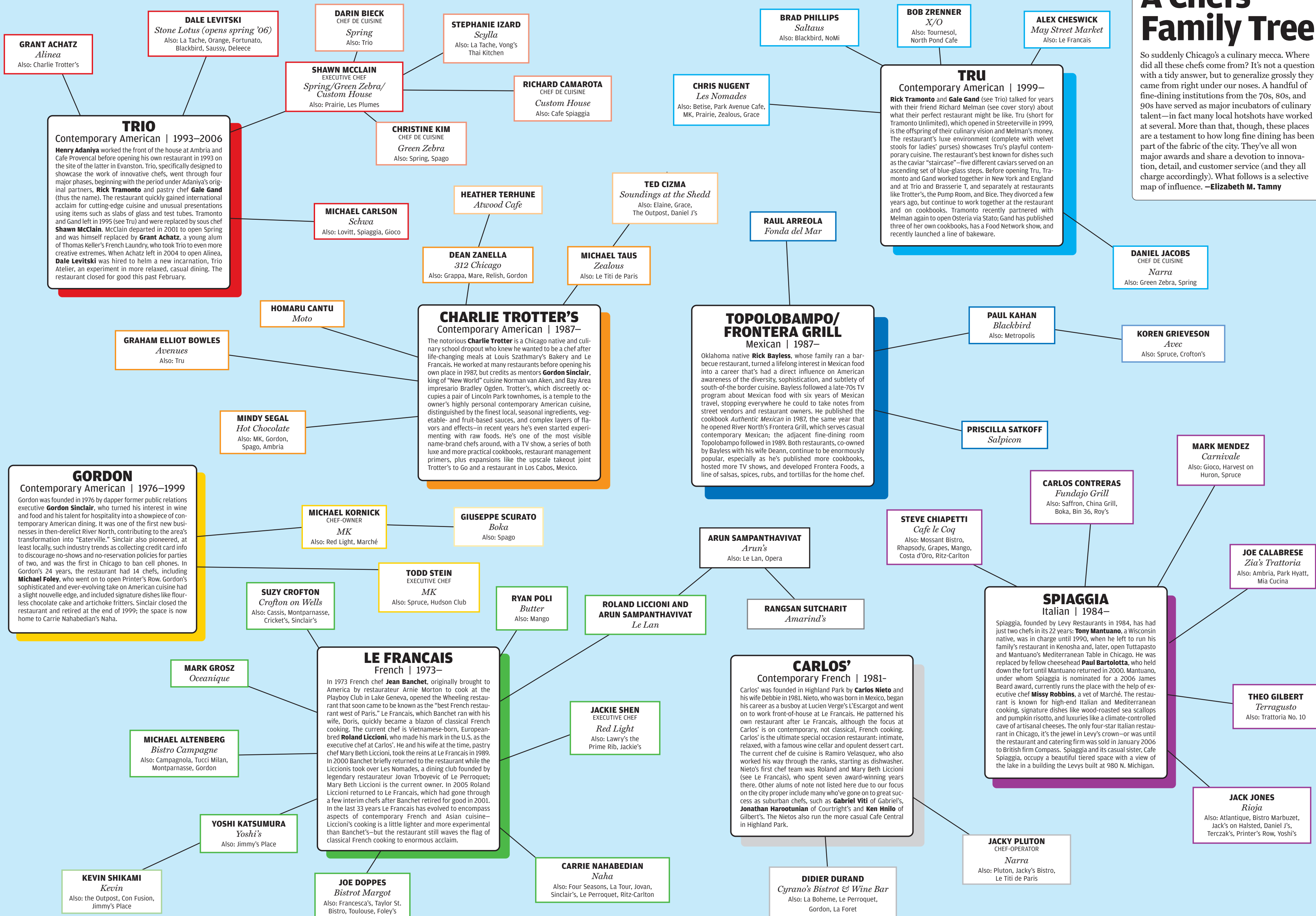


Restaurants Special

A Chefs' Family Tree

So suddenly Chicago's a culinary mecca. Where did all these chefs come from? It's not a question with a tidy answer, but to generalize grossly they came from right under our noses. A handful of fine-dining institutions from the 70s, 80s, and 90s have served as major incubators of culinary talent—in fact many local hotshots have worked at several. More than that, though, these places are a testament to how long fine dining has been part of the fabric of the city. They've all won major awards and share a devotion to innovation, detail, and customer service (and they all charge accordingly). What follows is a selective map of influence. —Elizabeth M. Tamny



GRANT ACHATZ
Alinea
Also: Charlie Trotter's

DALE LEVITSKI
Stone Lotus (opens spring '06)
Also: La Tache, Orange, Fortunato, Blackbird, Saussy, Delece

DARIN BIECK
CHEF DE CUISINE
Spring
Also: Trio

STEPHANIE IZARD
Scylla
Also: La Tache, Vong's Thai Kitchen

BRAD PHILLIPS
Saltaus
Also: Blackbird, NoMi

BOB ZRENNER
X/O
Also: Tournesol, North Pond Cafe

ALEX CHESWICK
May Street Market
Also: Le Francais

SHAWN MCCLAIN
EXECUTIVE CHEF
Spring/Green Zebra/Custom House
Also: Prairie, Les Plumes

RICHARD CAMAROTA
CHEF DE CUISINE
Custom House
Also: Cafe Spiaggia

CHRIS NUGENT
Les Nomades
Also: Betise, Park Avenue Cafe, MK, Prairie, Zealous, Grace

CHRISTINE KIM
CHEF DE CUISINE
Green Zebra
Also: Spring, Spago

TED CIZMA
Soundings at the Shedd
Also: Elaine, Grace, The Outpost, Daniel J's

MICHAEL CARLSON
Schwa
Also: Lovitt, Spiaggia, Gioco

HEATHER TERHUNE
Atwood Cafe

RAUL ARREOLA
Fonda del Mar

DEAN ZANELLA
312 Chicago
Also: Grappa, Mare, Relish, Gordon

MICHAEL TAUS
Zealous
Also: Le Titi de Paris

DANIEL JACOBS
CHEF DE CUISINE
Narra
Also: Green Zebra, Spring

HOMARU CANTU
Moto

GRAHAM ELLIOT BOWLES
Avenues
Also: Tru

MINDY SEGAL
Hot Chocolate
Also: MK, Gordon, Spago, Ambria

PAUL KAHAN
Blackbird
Also: Metropolis

KOREN GRIEVESON
Avec
Also: Spruce, Crofton's

GORDON
Contemporary American | 1976–1999
Gordon was founded in 1976 by dapper former public relations executive Gordon Sinclair, who turned his interest in wine and food and his talent for hospitality into a showpiece of contemporary American dining. It was one of the first new businesses in then-derelict River North, contributing to the area's transformation into "Eaterville." Sinclair also pioneered, at least locally, such industry trends as collecting credit card info to discourage no-shows and no-reservation policies for parties of two, and was the first in Chicago to ban cell phones. In Gordon's 24 years, the restaurant had 14 chefs, including Michael Foley, who went on to open Printer's Row. Gordon's sophisticated and ever-evolving take on American cuisine had a slight nouvelle edge, and included signature dishes like flourless chocolate cake and artichoke fritters. Sinclair closed the restaurant and retired at the end of 1999; the space is now home to Carrie Nahabedian's Naha.

MICHAEL KORNICK
CHEF-OWNER
MK
Also: Red Light, Marché

GIUSEPPE SCURATO
Boka
Also: Spago

PRISCILLA SATKOFF
Salpicon

MARK MENDEZ
Carnivale
Also: Gioco, Harvest on Huron, Spruce

SUZY CROFTON
Crofton on Wells
Also: Cassis, Montparnasse, Cricket's, Sinclair's

TODD STEIN
EXECUTIVE CHEF
MK
Also: Spruce, Hudson Club

RYAN POLI
Butter
Also: Mango

ARUN SAMPANTHAVIVAT
Arun's
Also: Le Lan, Opera

RANGSAN SUTCHARIT
Amarind's

STEVE CHIAPETTI
Cafe le Coq
Also: Mossant Bistro, Rhapsody, Grapes, Mango, Costa d'Oro, Ritz-Carlton

CARLOS CONTRERAS
Fundajo Grill
Also: Saffron, China Grill, Boka, Bin 36, Roy's

JOE CALABRESE
Zia's Trattoria
Also: Ambria, Park Hyatt, Mia Cucina

MARK GROSZ
Oceanique

MICHAEL ALTENBERG
Bistro Campagne
Also: Campagnola, Tucci Milan, Montparnasse, Gordon

LE FRANCAIS
French | 1973–
In 1973 French chef Jean Banchet, originally brought to America by restaurateur Arnie Morton to cook at the Playboy Club in Lake Geneva, opened the Wheeling restaurant that soon came to be known as the "best French restaurant west of Paris." Le Francais, which Banchet ran with his wife, Doris, quickly became a blazon of classical French cooking. The current chef is Vietnamese-born, European-born Roland Liccioni, who made his mark in the U.S. as the executive chef at Carlos'. He and his wife at the time, pastry chef Mary Beth Liccioni, took the reins at Le Francais in 1989. In 2000 Banchet briefly returned to the restaurant while the Liccioni's took over Les Nomades, a dining club founded by legendary restaurateur Jovan Trbojevic of Le Perroquet; Mary Beth Liccioni is the current owner. In 2005 Roland Liccioni returned to Le Francais, which had gone through a few interim chefs after Banchet retired for good in 2001. In the last 33 years Le Francais has evolved to encompass aspects of contemporary French and Asian cuisine—Liccioni's cooking is a little lighter and more experimental than Banchet's—but the restaurant still waves the flag of classical French cooking to enormous acclaim.

JACKIE SHEN
EXECUTIVE CHEF
Red Light
Also: Lawry's the Prime Rib, Jackie's

CARLOS'
Contemporary French | 1981–
Carlos' was founded in Highland Park by Carlos Nieto and his wife Debbie in 1981. Nieto, who was born in Mexico, began his career as a busboy at Lucien Verge's L'Escargot and went on to work front-of-house at Le Francais. He patterned his own restaurant after Le Francais, although the focus at Carlos' is on contemporary, not classical, French cooking. Carlos' is the ultimate special occasion restaurant: intimate, relaxed, with a famous wine cellar and opulent dessert cart. The current chef de cuisine is Ramiro Velasquez, who also worked his way through the ranks, starting as dishwasher. Nieto's first chef team was Roland and Mary Beth Liccioni (see Le Francais), who spent seven award-winning years there. Other alums of note not listed here due to our focus on the city proper include many who've gone on to great success as suburban chefs, such as Gabriel Viti of Gabriel's, Jonathan Haroutunian of Courtright's and Ken Hnilo of Gilbert's. The Nietos also run the more casual Cafe Central in Highland Park.

THEO GILBERT
Terragusto
Also: Trattoria No. 10

YOSHI KATSUMURA
Yoshi's
Also: Jimmy's Place

KEVIN SHIKAMI
Kevin
Also: the Outpost, Con Fusion, Jimmy's Place

JOE DOPPE
Bistrot Margot
Also: Francesca's, Taylor St. Bistro, Toulouse, Foley's

CARRIE NAHABEDIAN
Naha
Also: Four Seasons, La Tour, Jovan, Sinclair's, Le Perroquet, Ritz-Carlton

DIDIER DURAND
Cyran's Bistrot & Wine Bar
Also: La Boheme, Le Perroquet, Gordon, La Foret

JACKY PLUTON
CHEF-OPERATOR
Narra
Also: Pluton, Jacky's Bistro, Le Titi de Paris

JACK JONES
Rioja
Also: Atlantique, Bistro Marbutet, Jack's on Halsted, Daniel J's, Terczak's, Printer's Row, Yoshi's