

# VIEWS

A portrait of Christina Cates, a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, smiling at the camera. She is wearing a light beige ribbed sweater and a gold chain necklace. Her right hand is resting near her chin, showing a ring with a blue stone and red nail polish. A gold bracelet is visible on her left wrist. The background is a plain, light grey.

*christina cates.*

Photos by Maggie McGill Photography



## *credits.*

Talent. **Christina Cates**

Interview. **Vanesa Miraglia**

Photography. **Maggie McGill Photography**

## *with thanks to.*

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VIE TIES

- MAGAZINE -







# CHRISTINA *Cates*

Christina Cates radiates a sincere enthusiasm for the culinary arts, her insights are infused with personal stories that highlight her journey as a single mother and a dedicated champion of the restaurant industry. As she navigates the challenges of balancing family life with her professional pursuits, Christina draws on lessons learned in the kitchen that resonate deeply with her parenting style. Her travels have enriched her understanding of food as a powerful connector, revealing how cultural stories and traditions can shape our experiences around the table. With aspirations for her podcast, Culinary Confidential, Christina aims to create a welcoming space for food lovers and industry professionals alike, emphasizing the importance of authentic connections and shared narratives.







V: As a single mother of two young boys, how do you juggle the demands of your career in a high-pressure industry with your responsibilities at home? Are there lessons you've learned in the kitchen that resonate with your parenting style?

C: The restaurant industry involves a consistently demanding schedule; weekends, holidays, late nights. It's really not ideal with having a family so at this moment I'm not working in restaurants but I'm very lucky to have this radio show where I get to talk to people about the industry that I love and still feel like I'm connected to it. Plus I'm dining out a ton for "research" so that's been fun! One of the biggest things you learn in restaurants is a saying called "Full hands in, full hands out." This basically means if you're going into the kitchen bring something with you (full hands in) and when you're leaving the kitchen to go back into the front of the house bring something with you (full hands out). This philosophy has been pivotal in maintaining an organized household when I'm the only adult in the household and life can be chaotic with two little boys. It's about managing my time efficiently and working in restaurants have taught me how to do that because it's a fast paced environment.

V: Your podcast dives deep into the heart of hospitality. Can you share a moment from your travels that transformed your view on food and hospitality, and how that experience has influenced your podcast discussions?

C: Traveling to different countries has really shown me how food is probably the most universal topic there is. We all need food to live, we all have family recipes to share. When traveling to Bali, I couldn't believe how hospitable the Balinese people were. They were so kind and gentle and wanted to make sure you were very happy with everything. In Greece, they are so full of their vibrant culture. I was very surprised that the hospitality and service was as warm as it was. Every island I went to, the Greek people were so passionate and full of life and

just very thankful that Greece was the destination I chose for a vacation. I had servers share their grandmother's recipes with me. It was incredible. I think traveling has influenced the podcast and discussions because it pushes me to keep the content diverse and exciting and explore all cuisines and cultures.

V: You often talk to industry leaders on Culinary Confidential. Is there a particular conversation that shifted your perspective on the culinary arts, and how do you see those insights shaping your own approach to food and dining?

C: I did a show that aired around Hanukkah with Second Ave Deli owner, Jeremy Lebewohl, and Lox Café and Greenwich & Delancey owner, Chef David Teyf. This episode was all about the Jewish cuisine and culture. I went into this episode a little nervous because of the temperature of the political environment in the world currently. I look at my show as a platform to bring communities of people together and I didn't want to offend any person listening but wanted to feature the Jewish culture properly. There's a rich history in Jewish cuisine and hearing the stories of Jeremy and David and how the food impacts their community of people was really touching to hear. It was one of my favorite shows I did. What I took away from this episode was that spices and flavors used aren't what distinguish one cuisine from another ... it's the stories of the recipes, and how they were created, that do. When I eat something new now, I want to know the story behind how it evolved.

V: How do you introduce your love for food to Kingston and Topper? Are there any special recipes or culinary traditions you enjoy sharing with them that reflect your travels and experiences?

C: I take the boys to restaurants constantly in NYC. I rarely take them to "kid" places. I'll look at them and say hey jump in the car let's go to Chinatown for dumplings tonight. My children are diverse so I like to expose them



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to diverse cuisines. My older son, Kingston, is becoming a foodie. He definitely enjoys going to these higher end places more than my younger guy, Topper. The more I expose Topper the more he gets out of his food comfort zone so that makes me happy. Because I've traveled a good amount, I make a variety of flavorful dishes when I cook at home. Kingston & Topper are my taste testers. They have a kids kit of appropriate utensils so they help me meal prep. They're my little sous chefs. We could be having a pasta Bolognese one night or a shrimp coconut curry another.

V: In your extensive career, can you recount a significant challenge you faced that shaped your professional journey? How did that experience prepare you for the current landscape of the food service industry?

C: I was very young when I started managing people in restaurants. Too young to even legally have a drink in the restaurants I was operating. To get employees to take me seriously I had to be consistent with my decisions and that helped garner the respect from the staff. The early years were hard work, and it involved being the first one in and the last one out. It's the successful restaurant that I see that have owners present or managers on the floor touching tables. The personal touch is what separates the winners from the losers in the hospitality industry even currently.

V: Looking ahead, what are your aspirations for Culinary Confidential? How do you envision using your platform to impact the culinary community, especially for aspiring chefs and restaurant professionals?

C: I will feel like the show is a success if people look at the show as a hangout for foodies or industry people. I just want people to tune in once a week and know that it's going to be easy listening and a happy place ... and you may learn a thing or two along the way!

V: How does your personal style influence the way you approach restaurant management and hospitality? What unique elements do you bring to your dining experiences

that reflect your personality?

C: My personal style has always been, just be myself ... regardless of who is sitting at the table. I always treated every person the same that walked through the door whether you were dressed in a t shirt and jeans or a three piece suit. Hospitality is about being genuine and people can see through it when you're not. As far as restaurant management goes, I always believed in treating people FAIRLY ... not always equally. The same employee that shows up on time every day and does a good job is not going to be treated the same as the employee who is late all of the time. It's that simple.

V: To wrap up this engaging conversation, I'd like to ask a reflective question about courage in the culinary world. Your career in hospitality requires not only a passion for food but also a certain bravery, especially when navigating challenges like industry instability or the pressures of leadership. It takes courage to authentically represent the diverse voices and experiences of those in the food service profession. Can you share an anecdote from your journey where you had to demonstrate significant courage, whether it was in a pivotal role, a decision to advocate for a cause within the industry, or in your personal life as a single mother balancing your passion for food with family responsibilities?

C: Being a leader is hard, in any job. It's very hard being a female in a leadership role still. You have to believe in yourself and know your worth. I was faced with a difficult situation once where I was told by one of the owners of a restaurant, I was the GM at that, that I had until Monday to fire a popular bartender that was a bit older and replace him with a young attractive bartender. If I didn't do that I would be replaced. I told him where to shove his threats and left. I would never let someone pressure me to do something I didn't agree with ... even if it was my boss. I went down the street to work at another restaurant and took most of the clientele with me. That other restaurant that I previously worked for was riddled with lawsuits in the end resulting in the sale of the company and bankruptcy filings. No surprise there.







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