

Executive Chef Erin Gillum

Surprisingly, Chef Erin never intended to work in the hospitality industry. She attended IUPUI straight out of high school with the intention of becoming a neonatal nurse. “I realized pretty quickly that medicine was not for me,” she laughs. “I sat down and made a list of the things that I most enjoy in life because I wanted my career path to fit my passions, and food just kept coming up over and over again.” She quickly changed directions and enrolled in the now-defunct Chef’s Academy in Indianapolis where she studied under and formed a lifelong friendship with Chef Jason Anderson. While in culinary school, she worked with Chef Anderson at Dunaway’s Steakhouse and then completed an externship with 94 West in Orland Park, Illinois. Upon graduation from The Chef’s Academy, Erin worked at Binkley’s Kitchen and Bar, Mitchell’s Fish Market (where she discovered her love of seafood, as evidenced by her current menu), opened The Tilted Kilt in downtown Indianapolis as a Kitchen Manager in an effort to learn the administrative side of a chef’s job, A Cut Above Catering, where she learned the catering aspect, finally settling back with her friend and mentor Chef Anderson with Bon Appetit at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana. “Every move I have made in terms of accepting jobs has been intentional,” she says. “I am the kind of chef that wants to know the business aspect and front of house operations as well as the creative side of my job. Every position I have held has contributed to that knowledge.”

Everything changed last year when Erin received a 3:00am Facebook message from her good friend and the notoriously nocturnal Spoke & Steele General Manager, Emily Nicoson. Emily told Erin that Spoke & Steele had brought on legendary Indianapolis chef Greg Hardesty (formerly of Elements, H2O Sushi, and Recess and currently the owner of Studio C) as Consulting Chef. Emily thought that Greg and Erin would get along well and that Greg could help Erin to the next level in her career. “Greg met with Erin offsite for the first time and sent me a text that said, ‘Is this girl for real? If this was Recess, I would hire her on the spot, whether I had a position available or not,’” Emily remembers. Erin was quickly brought on as Chef de Cuisine and she and Greg worked closely together on last year’s ever-evolving Spoke & Steele menu. When Greg’s consultancy was up, he proudly handed over the title of Executive Chef to Erin.

In April of 2019, Chef Erin debuted her first personally curated menu at Spoke & Steele to rave reviews. She has shifted the structure of the menu to a small, medium, and large plate format with a focus on fresh, local, and organic meats, cheese, and produce and the freshest fish available in the Midwest. “While I certainly love to eat and prepare Asian cuisine, I’ve included a little bit of everything on this menu from my beloved Asian to Southern to fusion, all with a little personal spin,” she says.

Chef Erin and Emily work closely together to define Spoke & Steele as an Indy restaurant first, and a hotel restaurant second. “Establishing our own identity is a goal of ours,” says Erin. “We want to be the best at what we do, and we want to continually evolve that definition.” She and Emily share the same management ethos of a cohesive restaurant, with no division between front of house and back of house staff, and a collective desire for both food and service to be on point at all times. Servers and bartenders are involved in menu development, and line cooks are educated on Emily’s wine list and the cocktail list as well. “Knowledge is power,” says Erin. “And when everyone is educated on all aspects of the restaurant, it makes for a great team environment.” Erin and Emily also pride themselves on being at the helm of a strong, female-operated restaurant and look forward to implementing new sustainability initiatives in the coming months.

In her free time, Chef Erin enjoys spending time with her large and close-knit family and her beloved Boxers, Gus and Olive. She loves spending time outdoors, be it fishing or camping or hiking.