

October 1, 2014

Keith McNally's 28-year-old daughter Sophie joins the family restaurant business



Sophie McNally (inset left, with her sister, actress Isabelle McNally) is bringing the buzz to Cherche Midi, the new downtown spot from their dad, Keith McNally.

The one piece of advice famed restaurateur [Keith McNally](#) has for his 28-year-old daughter, Sophie?

“Never listen to the boss,” says McNally, 63.

Perhaps easier said than done when you’re working for your dad.

Last summer, McNally’s second-eldest child, Sophie, was anointed operational manager for all his fabled NYC restaurants, including [Minetta Tavern](#) and [Balthazar](#).

Since then, the East Village resident with an artfully tousled blond mane has planned private dinners for chichi friends such as Chris Burch's designer daughters, Louisa and Pookie Burch, and added cool to her British dad's 3-month-old hot spot, [Cherche Midi](#).



NYC's restaurant king Keith McNally takes a nap on his heir apparent, Sophie McNally (center), in 2010.

“She dissuaded me from writing the menu on the mirrors, saying it had been done too much before. And she was right,” admits McNally, who says he was “shocked she wanted to enter the dishonorable world of restaurants.

“But that’s what a good education does, unfortunately,” he says.

Sophie, who declined to be interviewed, grew up with all the trappings of her father’s success (his restaurants are estimated to have revenues approaching \$100 million a year).

That includes access to the toughest reservation lines in town, antiquing trips to France, a farm out in Martha’s Vineyard where Meg Ryan and Keith Richards have hung out, and her own cohort of A-list pals such as designer and party fixture Waris Ahluwalia and filmmaker Jack Bryan, son of Anna Wintour’s long-time boyfriend Shelby Bryan.

Still, a low-key Sophie, who looks as though she’s been plucked straight from a mumblecore flick, wasn’t salivating to join the “dishonorable” family biz (her mother, Lynn Wagenknecht, McNally’s first wife, has three buzzy eateries to her name, including Odeon).

“I think she didn’t want to do anything that seemed obvious,” says Carlos Quirarte, co-owner of East Village mainstay the Smile.

After graduating from the American University in Paris, McNally’s daughter gave it a go at something new, toiling as a talent assistant at “Saturday Night Live” (“SNL” honcho Lorne Michaels happens to be a close pal of McNally’s) and working at Alice Waters’ charity, the Edible Schoolyard Project.

“But some things are just in your blood,” says Quirarte, “and I think that was one of the realizations that she came to.”

Eat out once with Sophie and, friends say, the restaurant heiress’ genetic destiny is written in the sauce.



Among Sophie McNally’s A-list pals is designer and party fixture Waris Ahluwalia.

“We’d walk into a spot for dinner and she would know every operational error. ‘That guy should be standing here, that guy should be doing this.’ . . . It was amazing,” says Jonathan Keidan, co-founder of [InsideHook](#), a men’s lifestyle platform.

“It’s like she has superhero restaurateur glasses on and everybody else is just living with bare eyes,” concurs Jennifer Rubell, an artist well-known for her food-art installations.

Insiders say Sophie — who’s spearheading McNally’s new spot slated to open next year at The Beekman Hotel — is more of a “front person” than her endearingly rumped father, who’s famously lashed out at critics who have been, well, critical of his establishments.

“Sophie is always watching the room,” says Quirarte, who fondly remembers how the gallery-loving gal didn’t skip a beat when she cooked up dinner for 10 at her apartment and dropped the main dish on the floor.

“She’s so concerned with everyone else having a good time that sometimes I wonder if she’s having a good time,” he adds.

Dana Veraldi says “a charismatic, but somewhat reserved” Sophie has “always had her priorities straight.” “She’s so dedicated to work,” says Veraldi, who is BFFs with Sophie’s less camera-shy 25-year-old sister, Isabelle McNally, girlfriend of “Wolf of Wall Street” star Jonah Hill. (Sophie also has an older brother, Harry McNally, 29, as well as two half-siblings from her father’s second marriage.)

It’s Sophie’s steadfast nature that has foodies citywide breathing a collective sigh of relief: “Keith McNally has done for food what Ralph Lauren has done for fashion. If someone wasn’t there to carry on the legacy of Keith McNally’s restaurants, that’d be a sad thing for New York,” says Danyelle Freeman, founder of the blog, [Restaurant Girl](#).

But McNally says all that talk is rubbish: “Legacy is a ridiculous word.

“Restaurants last no longer than Broadway shows,” he says. “I just hope she enjoys what she’s doing and continues to be decent to people.”

In the meantime, McNally says his heir apparent has already taught him a thing or two. For one? “Not to hire family,” he quips.

[\(https://nypost.com/2014/10/01/keith-mcnallys-28-year-old-daughter-sophie-joins-the-family-restaurant-business/\)](https://nypost.com/2014/10/01/keith-mcnallys-28-year-old-daughter-sophie-joins-the-family-restaurant-business/)