

Too big for his bouillon?

The culinary world's Doogie Howser stirs up controversy in the kitchen

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From Justin Bieber, who at 14 had a hit video on YouTube, to actress Hailee Steinfeld, who at the same age had an Academy Award nomination followed by an ad campaign with Miu Miu, the next big thing keeps getting younger and younger.

Enter Flynn McGarry, a freckle-faced Southern California teen, who's been cooking out of Thomas Keller's French Laundry cookbook since the tender age of 10. Now, at 14, he's expected to hold court for the second time among culinary royalty Daniel Humm and Will Guidara at their three-Michelin-starred Eleven Madison Park come Aug. 13-18.



Young Chef Flynn McGarry

So how did McGarry score such a gig at an age when most boys are concerned with immersing themselves in Xbox and boobs than circulators and duck breasts?

To hear him tell it, he's just an oddball.

"I'm shy and weird," McGarry told the New Yorker in April. "But every chef I've met is weird, basically. We want to work long days, it's really stressful, it's hot, you get cut, it's brutal. But we love it. We live for it." Even if "living for it" is just four short years?

Many are dubious. While he's holding a regular, 10-course supper club called Eureka out of his family's San Fernando Valley home, experienced adult line cooks are slaving over hot stoves and toiling up the ranks of the city's smallest, busiest kitchens.

"His success so far is clearly a result of his access," quips Jason Kessler, a Los Angeles-based food writer who pens "The Nitpicker" column for Bon Appetit. "If I was a chef, I think I'd be a little miffed that this kid was getting the attention without putting his time in the kitchen. I can't wait to see the 4-year-old who makes his own baby food."

What's more, Flynn's mom Meg, a screenwriter who manages his p.r.,

declined The Post's request for an interview saying he's "taking a press break until he actually needs some."

Well, then.

This past May, he held a "pop-up" night at a Hollywood restaurant, serving 100 diners a 9-course meal of preciously tiled dishes, like "Mushrooms on a Log" (Liquid nitrogen and a protein cooked sous vide were also involved. Of

Prior to that, he did a stage — the culinary equivalent of a short apprenticeship — at Alinea in Chicago and Modernist Cuisine Food Lab in Seattle.

While noting a few mix-ups in the kitchen (teenagers!), Eater LA editor Kat Odell raved about his spring pop-up dinner, which included chive blossoms the young chef foraged himself, calling it "actual food porn."

More than his cooking, though, it seems to be his knowledge that has industry-vets wide-eyed.

At a signing for the Eleven Madison Park cookbook at a Southern California Sur La Table store last fall, Flynn made quite an impression on Humm and Guidara. "He was so passionate about food and wine and was one of the few people that had already cooked from the book," Guidara recalls. "Daniel took a liking to him just based on that enthusiasm."

(Perhaps he saw a bit of himself in the skinny kid, as Humm himself started training to be a chef at 14, while fellow Eleven Madison Park chef de cuisine James Kent was just 15 when he started working in David Bouley's kitchen.)

As if the praise among New York City's best isn't enough, Danish chef Rene Redzepi, who cooks at Copenhagen restaurant Noma (named the best restaurant in the world for the past three years), saw potential after meeting McGarry at a UCLA lecture and invited him to stage, too.

And where there's a stage, there's a stage mom.

While McGarry spends two days a week interning at a Los Angeles restaurant, his mother has gone to great lengths to encourage her son's culinary aspirations — despite not being a cook herself — and went into credit card debt to turn his bedroom into a miniature version of Grant Achatz's kitchen at Alinea, complete with four induction burners and stainless steel counters. (His bed folds up.)

His older sister, Paris, enthusiastically lends her support to her brother and on her hyperbolically named blog, "The Sister of a Culinary Prodigy," enthuses about Flynn being "the coolest brother ever" and "a high class, fancy pants chef."

"Prodigy," however, might be taking things a bit far. "For his age, he definitely has a lot of knowledge," says Eleven Madison Park's Kent who took Flynn under his wing when he staged at the restaurant for the first time earlier this year.

But becoming a great chef is more about hard work than having prodigal talent, Kent says. "Cooking isn't like basketball."

When McGarry was at restaurant in the spring, he cooked a meal for Humm, Kent and the sous chefs, as all stages do. "It was good," admits Kent of the

squab the boy served, but it was far from perfect. "We critiqued him, told him things we might have done different."

They stressed the need for balance — both in the sauce on the squab, and in life for the laser-focused food lover.

Most importantly, he tried to impress upon Flynn the importance of years and years of experience and perfecting a task by doing it thousands of times. "That's what it takes to really learn to cook," Kent says. "He's a chef at home. If he were to come here to work here, he would be a commis."