

StarChefs.com is the site for top toques - and their most dedicated fans

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When the heavy hitters of food media come to mind, you probably think Gourmet, Food & Wine or even [Epicurious.com](#). But when chefs want to keep up with Joneses, they often wind up reading [StarChefs.com](#).

Launched in the early-Internet era of 1995, [StarChefs.com](#) is still mostly unknown outside of the professional chef scene. But that's beginning to change, thanks in large part to [CEO Antoinette Bruno](#).

Bruno — who has an MBA from [Harvard](#), a post-graduate degree from the [London School of Economics](#) and a stint helping the British brand [The Body Shop](#) find marketing success in the States — took leadership of the struggling consumer food site in 1999, after meeting a founder in a mommy-and-me style class.



Antoinette Bruno, CEO of StarChefs.com, built the once-modest site into an industry powerhouse.

Bruno had been looking for a way to use her management and marketing skills and a love for food originally honed in her first career in high finance. At the age of 22, she took a job as a [Wall Street](#) power player — and one of five women at Solomon Brothers in the late 1980s. But beyond the great salary, she found that only part of the gig she liked was taking her clients out to Lutece and La Cote Basque, then the city's top French restaurants.

"The more I learned about fine dining, the more I was liking the entertaining side of my job more than the other stuff," says Bruno. "It would be great, she remembers thinking, "if I was making this money and was really happy."

The realization prompted her to leave for a stint cooking in [France](#), first in a kitchen and then in classes at Ritz Escoffier in [Paris](#). But after deciding that she wasn't really cut out to be a French chef — she couldn't lift 100 pound bags of potatoes and hated to ask for help — Bruno decided to hit business school, eventually ending up at the Body Shop, back on Wall Street and then at home with her first child.

She was looking for a way to combine her unique background — a mix of food, finance, management and marketing — when she stumbled across the founder of StarChefs.com, who was in desperate need of an infusion of cash and ideas.

"I raised the money in a month," says Bruno who also took a percentage ownership in the company, "she'd been trying to raise the money for four years."

And despite plenty of hairy months where Bruno and a few dedicated staffers didn't really get paychecks, Bruno's background, her decision to focus on industry readers and her Wall Street contacts (who trusted her judgment and kicked in to help) are now paying off.

In the past decade, StarChefs.com has gone from a struggling plain-Jane food site to the must-post place for food industry jobs to a multi-platform entity wooing those who really know restaurant management and food.

The site is now a storehouse of videos, chef-provided recipes, news, management tips, chef profiles and gear reviews geared to professional chefs and those who follow them. Instead of what's on trendy tables, this is the place where you learn how to turn pork into foam or make better chef de cuisine hiring decisions.

Bruno's crew also produces a yearly "Chefs to Know," guide, largely the only available who's who of the industry's major players, runs national chef-to-chef demos called StarChefs Studios and gives out "rising stars" awards to chefs from four cities each year.

For that job, Bruno and her small staff go on traveling binges to selected cities, where they set up tastings with notable or up-and-coming chefs for several 12-hour days. Beyond using those belly-busting excursions to scope out the chef awards, they also use the trips to catalog trends and new recipes and profile chefs and restaurants for the site.

"Everything we write about," says Bruno, "is what we see."

But the company's most high-profile shindig is shaping up to be three-year-old conference Bruno has named the [Chefs Congress](#), which takes over the New York Armory building for three days starting September 12.

Open only to working professionals in the food world — tickets are \$195 a day for those working and restaurants and \$295 for food writers and others in the industry — it brings national and international chefs, mixologists, restaurateurs, food writers and food pundits together for panels on culinary trailblazers or working with local produce, demos on new gin cocktails, modern pastry techniques or Mexican street food, and of course, plenty of after-parties.

As run of the mill diners, most of us can't get into the seminars, though a lot of it