

growing up foodie

by Mikela Floyd

Photographs by Annie Ray

FOR AUSTIN'S PINT-SIZED GOURMETS, eating out usually involves less chicken tenders, more kimchi. *TRIBEZA* sat down with some of Austin's biggest culinary players to learn how they're teaching their kids about food, the importance of making good choices early, and why feeding kids healthy food doesn't have to be hard.

KENTA, AGE 12

Kayo and Také Azasu, Komé

Born in Japan, Kayo and Také Azasu sought to recreate the healthy homestyle Japanese atmosphere they knew and loved into something that Austinites could share together. The couple opened Komé on Airport Boulevard in 2011, and succeeded in creating one of Austin's most sought-after spots. For the Azasu family, eating well is a family tradition. "My parents were always foodies," says Kayo. "My dad worked in a restaurant for a long time, and my mom and grandmother were great cooks, so no matter where I was, I pretty [much] always had access to the best meals." For her son, Kenta, life isn't much different. Though he considers himself to be a "picky" eater, his mom refutes this. "I think he doesn't realize how differently we eat from other families," she says. "One of his favorite snacks is fermented beans." Their typical dinnertime routine relies heavily on

variety, and includes everything from Vietnamese to Thai to Indian. "I try to teach him to eat a bunch of different kinds of food and cuisines," explains Kayo. Though the family is apt to dine out occasionally, Kayo strives to teach her children (who also include 15-year-old daughter Kaya) to be self-sufficient and cook their own meals, as she learned to do as part of her childhood education in Japan. "It's hard in this country for kids to learn how to cook for themselves," she says. "So we grow our own food and have chickens, so they feel invested. It's a lot more exciting for them than picking a bunch of carrots off the shelf." But don't worry if your child isn't exactly a budding gourmet. When asked for his favorite junk food, Kenta didn't disappoint: "Pizza!"



Below: Self-proclaimed "picky eater" Kenta enjoys an after school meal at Thai Fresh.

Kenta, Age 12

FAVORITE PLACES TO EAT:
PHO VAN, P. TERRY'S, KOREAN BBQ

FAVORITE FOODS:
WATERMELON, KOME'S TUNA NIGIRI,
VIETNAMESE NOODLES





Anjali, Age 4 Ananda, Age 2

FAVORITE PLACES TO EAT:

TARKA INDIAN KITCHEN, THAI FRESH,
CENTRAL MARKET

FAVORITE FOODS:

HOMEMADE ALMOND MEAL CRACKERS
AND PATÉ, SPAGHETTI AND MEATBALLS
WITH ZUCCHINI NOODLES, PANCAKES

Ananda (L) and Anjali (R) sample foods at the Sunset Valley SFC Farmers' Market, a family favorite.

“Cooking is a shared experience. Of course, involving them takes twice as long, and it’s ten times as messy, but the end result is that they’re really proud of what they’re eating.”

ANJALI, AGE 4 and ANANDA, AGE 2
Tarica and Alex Navarro, Kettle & Brine

As co-founders of the perfectly curated home and kitchen emporium Kettle & Brine, Tarica and Alex Navarro believe that a great meal is the heart of a family, and should be celebrated in turn. That belief carries into their home life in a big way. For daughters Anjali and Ananda, food is not only a huge part of their lives, but a daily lesson in self-sufficiency. “By introducing them to healthy food, we’re giving them life skills,” Tarica says, “People don’t understand the importance of food as nourishment, so when you start them early, you’re teaching them that healthy eating is a habit.” And these kids certainly started early. Beginning with the practice of baby-led weaning at six months, the Navarros introduced their daughters to food in its purest form. “We just put foods like broccoli and chicken in front of them and let them pick it up,” Tarica says. “So they knew early on what food tasted like and could see it in its natural form.”

Raised in Thailand, Tarica grew up in a family of home cooks, and the ritual of shared preparation has shaped how she and Alex raise their kids. “Cooking is a shared experience,” she says. The girls have their own child-friendly prep tools, and chop vegetables and sort ingredients while the family cooks together. “Of course, involving them takes twice as long, and it’s ten times as messy, but the end result is that they’re really proud of what they’re eating,” Tarica says. When the family does stray from their home kitchen, they stick with favorites from Austin’s culinary scene: Veracruz All Natural Tacos, Tarka Indian Kitchen, and fare from local farmers’ markets. “We eat pretty strict at home, but when we go out, we can be more flexible.” Among Anjali and Ananda’s favorites? The Kombucha at neighborhood favorite Radio Coffee & Beer. “They love it!”

“They’re little, you know? If you’re going to branch out, start small with tiny portions.”

BILLIE VAN, AGE 8

**Ned Elliott of Foreign & Domestic
and Jodi Elliott of Bribery Bakery**

With a menu that features items like fried pig ears and Bandera Quail, it’s hard to imagine someone like Foreign & Domestic Chef Ned Elliott making chicken nuggets and grilled cheese. So with daughter Billie Van, he takes a bit of a different approach, one inspired by his own childhood. Growing up as one of three adoptive children to two busy working moms, Ned admits they had to get creative when it came to feeding their brood. “My moms would feed us ‘bologna sandwiches’ until one day we found out it was tongue. We couldn’t believe it!” he laughs. “Or we’d eat calf brains and have no idea until a week later.” Ned says that while these tricks made him a self-proclaimed “simple eater” through high school, he isn’t afraid to sneak some flare into Billie’s diet, too. “I took her to Los Angeles and we ate at Animal (the notable LA eatery known for its offal specialties), and I was a little nervous,” Ned says. “So I ordered her a few things, told her that chicken tendons were potato chips, and she loved

it.” Though her dad claims he’ll try anything, Billie isn’t quite the queen of culinary adventure — yet. Like any eight-year-old, she loves pizza, and claims In-N-Out as a favorite. But junk food isn’t king by any means. Ned says that it’s all about trade-offs. “If she wants something sweet, I make sure to balance it out with extra veggies and protein.” Learning how ingredients are sourced is another important lesson as well. Thanks to a family relative with a cattle farm, and a backyard garden at Ned’s home, Billie has been able to see the food source first-hand. But if she’s learning where food comes from, Ned says that as a parent, the most important lesson he’s learned is to keep things in perspective. “They’re little, you know? If you’re going to branch out, start small [with] tiny portions,” he says. “And don’t overdo it with the spices — a little bit of heat to a grownup is way too much for a kid’s mouth.” Spoken like a true culinary caretaker. **7**

Billie Van enjoys a modern take on a classic kid favorite, Margherita pizza, at Bufalina Due.

Billie Van, Age 8

FAVORITE PLACES TO EAT:

BUFALINA, FOREIGN & DOMESTIC

FAVORITE FOODS:

CHEESE PIZZA, FRUIT

