

Still Hungry

A successful entrepreneur with 9 million social media followers, the author of *Eitan Eats the World* discusses his career at the wise old age of 20.



Eitan Bernath always loved cooking. At 11, he decided on a whim to apply to be on a kids-only episode of *Chopped*. He didn't win when he appeared on the Food Network show, but that debut led to another TV appearance. In 2015 the Teaneck resident started Eitan Bernath Productions to create food and lifestyle content, and he launched a TikTok account in late 2019, posting video tutorials of his recipes. Now Bernath is a bona fide foodie influencer with nine million followers across his social media platforms. He's also a (self-taught) chef, the principal culinary contributor for *The Drew Barrymore Show*, the author of the cookbook *Eitan Eats the World* and the youngest-ever member of *Forbes*' "30 Under 30" list of business leaders in the Food & Drink category. All of that whetted BERGEN's appetite to learn more.

What happened after you appeared on *Chopped*? I started a blog and a social media presence. It was a natural evolution and next step in how I wanted to blend my love for food with sharing it with other people. I was on TikTok before it became really mainstream in the U.S., in 2019. I posted a lot of content and very quickly grew my following. I think I had a million followers in three to four months. At the same time, I was pushing content through Instagram and Facebook.

The turning point was after I graduated high school at The Frisch School in Paramus. I told my parents I wanted to take a gap year before college. All my friends from high school were in Israel for the year, so I had literally no social life. I spent all my time making content. I made income here and there from my content, but I wasn't fully supporting myself at that time. After some time, I signed with a management team and to an agency, and the financial side of the business started to grow accordingly.

Did you have any foodie mentors growing up? I loved watching Food Network. I'd see what Guy Fieri was making and I would say, "Mom, can you make this guac burger with golden onion rings?" And she'd be like, "I don't know how to make that—why don't you try it?" So I started spending more time in the kitchen and experimenting. Cooking didn't always feel like the coolest thing for a teenager to do, and Guy really helped give me the confidence to pursue it as a career.

How often do you post on social media? I post about 70 to 100 posts a week across all my platforms on TikTok, Instagram and Facebook. The work is divided pretty evenly across my team. [Editor's note: Bernath has eight full-time employees across



operations, culinary and post-production.) We're a well-oiled machine when it comes to the production and posting schedule! Posting so often helps me grow my following and monetize the content.

You just finished your first semester at Columbia University. Is it hard to balance your business with being a student?

I work a lot; I will say that. I'm very part-time at Columbia. But I really loved my nonfiction writing workshop last semester. I'm not going to college to eventually get a job, since I already have one, so I'm kind of doing school and career in reverse order. I realize I'm very privileged in that regard, but I love learning. I'm thinking of maybe studying journalism. That's always interested me, maybe because one of my grandmas was a journalist back in the '70s and '80s.

Do you have a lot of fan encounters on campus? I've definitely run into a few. On the last day of class, actually, I had some students come over to me and tell me they were fans. They waited until the last class to tell me, which I appreciated. [Laughs.]

You've been posting style videos recently. What made you want to branch out beyond food?

I really love cooking, but I love clothes too. They're both creative expressions. I like to show other parts of my life beyond food, like my outfits and my cats and my dog. I started posting more GRWM ["Get Ready With Me"] videos, and have an amazing stylist, Michelle Blashka, who's also from Teaneck. I've been working with her for a few years; she helped dress me for the White House dinner.

You've been on *Good Morning America* and in *The New York Times*, and you're friends with Drew Barrymore. What's been the biggest "pinch me" moment so far?

It was probably the first time I went to the White House in 2021 for the menorah lighting—when anti-Semitism was on the rise. That was really meaningful. You could hear all the Hanukkah brachot

[blessings] that Jews have been saying for hundreds of years throughout the White House. It was very emotional. I was wearing a mask, I was sobbing and my mask was soaking wet.

What was your reaction when you found out you made the *Forbes* "30 Under 30" list in the Food & Drink category?

Actually, funny story. In 2021, I was at the White House event when the Biden administration was unveiling its holiday decorations. I had to fly back home to New York for a shoot the following morning. I was wearing my Jewish star necklace, and someone comes up to me and goes, "Oh, the First Lady would love to have you at the Hanukkah party tomorrow." And I was like, "Oh that would be great, but that's not really going to happen." Then, when that shoot wrapped, I got a call from my team saying, "Eitan, you got *Forbes* 30 Under 30!" After the shoot in NYC, I made the three-hour trip back to D.C. for the Hanukkah party. It was an insane day. That whole time was definitely my biggest "pinch me" moment.

What a day!

Two or three months after that, I was talking to my therapist and I was like, "Hmm, I don't think I ever fully processed the *Forbes* list thing. Can we unpack this?"

Tell me about your upbringing in Teaneck.

I grew up in a Jewish household, so of course food was always at the center of our traditions. I had a small family—just me, my dad, my mom and my younger brother, Yoni—so we were really close. I grew up going to Jewish private schools and loved being in a Jewish community. Another thing I love about Teaneck is how diverse it is; I had a lot of friends and neighbors who weren't Jewish too. I wasn't into sports, but I would spend a lot of time at Votee Park. My friends and I would go to the movie theater, either to Teaneck Cinemas or the AMC in Paramus. When I'm with my mom, we cook and go to



Clockwise from left: Bernath shares many Israeli-inspired recipes, such as this green shakshuka; Bernath is the principal culinary contributor for *The Drew Barrymore Show* on CBS; he cooked Indian food for Bill Gates in a May '22 interview that promoted both entrepreneurs' new books.

the Ramsey Farmers' Market.

What's next, personally and professionally?

Personally, I would like to do more philanthropy. I'm on the food council at City Harvest, and I'm an ambassador for Animal Haven, both in Manhattan. Professionally, I want to do more travel. I travel for work, which I'm grateful for, and recently went to India, where I filmed a ton of content. Now is the time in my life to do that, because when I'm married and have kids, it will be a lot harder.

Any plans for another cookbook?

A book is a labor of love, I can tell you that! *Eitan Eats the World* is like my child. I spent five months in my kitchen every weekday testing three to four recipes, then two weeks on a book shoot where I had a team of about 15 people shooting almost six recipes a day. We then spent about a year perfecting the copy and putting it out into the world. That said, I'm definitely excited for some projects coming up.

—Haley Longman