

FOR THE PROFESSIONAL

Pastry

ART & DESIGN

NOVEMBER 2003

10 BEST PASTRY CHEFS IN AMERICA



AT THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY



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*The Party,
The Chefs,
and Their
Most-Prized
Recipes*

BATTER UP

For each of the past 10 years we have been naming 10 pastry chefs as our best of the year. Why did we start such a thing? The political answer would be that we wanted to acknowledge the fine work of a select number of pastry chefs. If I were sports-minded (and I am), it might be that I wanted to create a competitive feeling among many deserving pastry chefs. The entertainer in me envisioned an annual party celebrating these pastry chefs, where I could get up and be the emcee. Or, if it were for education, we could always claim that we started this naming as a way to get pastry chefs to “push the envelope” in order to be noticed and named. I have really grown to hate that term “push the envelope.” I’m not even sure what it means. What has pushing an envelope got to do with innovation? Maybe we should say they “reinvent the envelope.” All of these possibilities got me to thinking about the real reasons for why we do what we do.

The real reason we started the 10 Best was all of the above and to recognize the key players in the pastry world who have distinguished themselves for their stellar work and for playing a pivotal role in the industry. They really — *sorry, but here goes* — push the envelope. This issue is devoted entirely to the 10 who have astounded me with their drive for excellence. I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to all of them.

Michael Schneider
Publisher/Editor-in-Chief







JOHNNY IUZZINI STARTED YOUNG. AT 15, HE'D RIDE HIS BIKE TO A COUNTRY CLUB NEAR HIS HOUSE, AT FIRST TO WASH DISHES, THEN TO PEEL CARROTS, AND LATER TO CUT VEGETABLES. AT 17 HE WAS WORKING AT THE RIVER CAFÉ. ON HIS 18TH BIRTHDAY HE STARTED AT THE CIA. HE'S EXTERNED WITH LINCOLN CARSON, WORKED FOR DANIEL BOULUD AND STAGED FOR FRANCOIS PAYARD'S PARENTS. AND NOW AT 28, HE'S THE PASTRY CHEF AT JEAN-GEORGES IN NEW YORK CITY AND ONE OF OUR 10 BEST PASTRY CHEFS OF THE YEAR.

PAD: Did you know you'd get this far?

Jl: I never thought I'd get to where I am today. So much has to do with Daniel Boulud and Francois Payard pushing me and believing in me, and guys like Florian Bellanger and Jacques Torres who elevate the industry, just through their personality. And because of guys like, Jean-George, who gave me a chance at such a young age.

PAD: Have you ever worked in another field?

Jl: I've never had another job outside of the kitchen. I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I ever burned out. I'd probably — I don't know — be a housewife.

PAD: Why did you choose to be a pastry chef instead of a savory chef?

Jl: Part of the reason is that I don't like to kill anything. My mother's a wildlife veterinarian. I grew up feeding raccoons and deer back to health with baby bottles. It's hard for me to kill things, to see whole calves come into the kitchen when I have a farm next to my house. I can't even kill a lobster without saying a Hail Mary for it.

PAD: Do you remember the first thing you made?

Jl: Crème brûlée. Sometimes the basic things are the best things. The foundation of pastry is that you always have to go back. Anything you build has to be on top of a foundation that is true and honest. It's like a house. A house without a foundation goes nowhere.

Johnny Iuzzini brushes up on his skills at the American Museum of Natural History.

PAD: Do you have a food vice?

Jl: Krispy Kream Donuts and McDonald's Double Bacon Cheeseburgers. I could spend \$7 on the Dollar Menu.

PAD: Do you have a favorite flavor to work with?

Jl: It used to be licorice, probably because of my dad. Growing up, I wasn't allowed to

Johnny Iuzzini



