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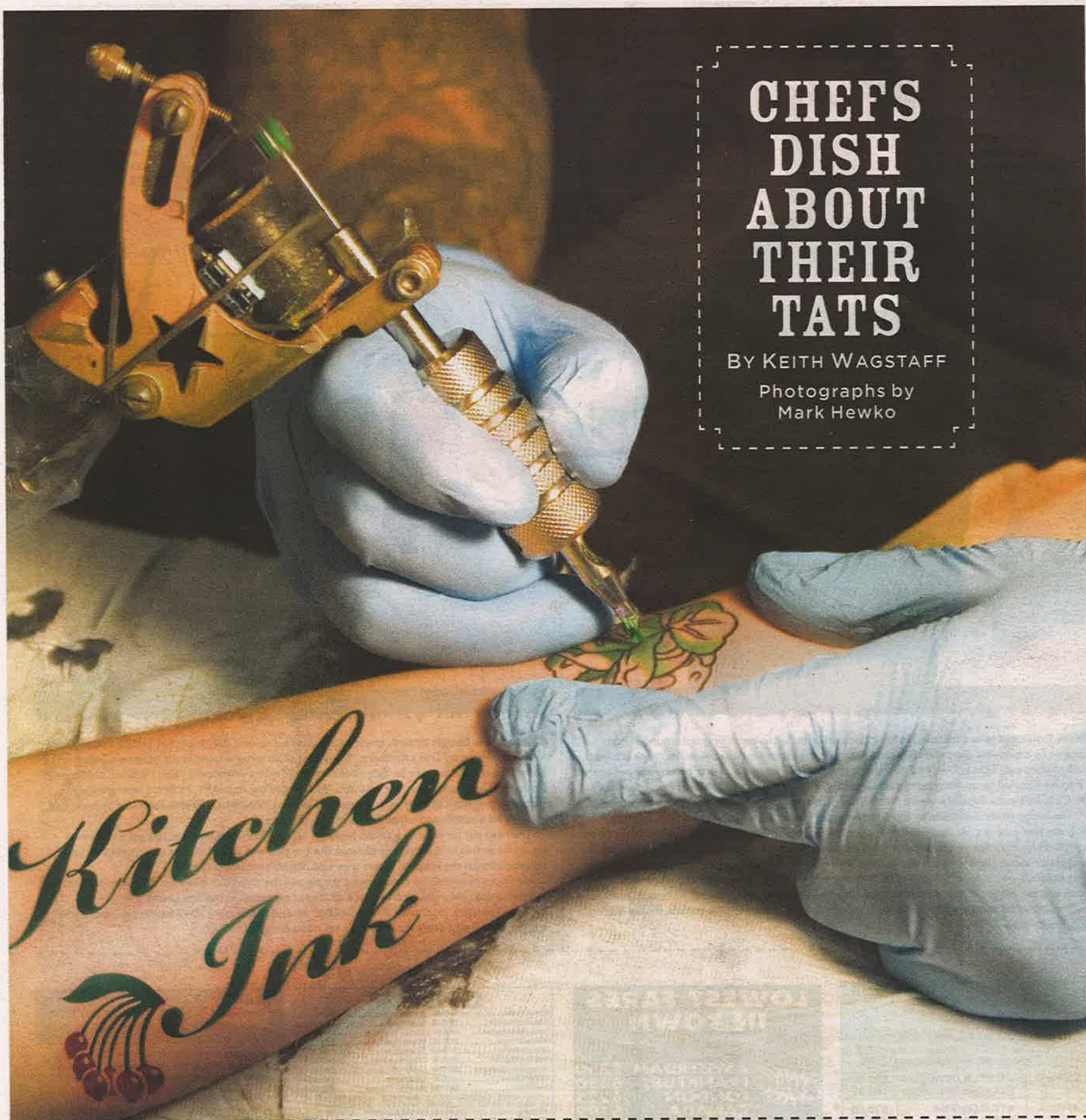
PART 4:
The NYPD TAPES
By Graham Rayman

KITCHEN INK:
CHEFS DISH ABOUT THEIR TATS

STORY BY KEITH WAGSTAFF | PHOTOS BY MARK HEWKO



Jesse Schenker, executive chef at Recette



CHEFS DISH ABOUT THEIR TATS

BY KEITH WAGSTAFF

Photographs by
Mark Hewko

YOU CAN TRACE THE ORIGINS OF THE CHEF-AS-OUTLAW archetype roughly to the year 2000, when Anthony Bourdain released his surprise hit *Kitchen Confidential* and images of toqued gourmands were replaced by toking misfits in the imagination of the general populace. And where misfits go, so do tattoos.

"I've always accepted them," says Colicchio & Sons' Shane McBride of tattoos in the kitchen. "I started cooking in South Florida. There's a writer who once said that that's where criminals go to die. I worked in restaurants with a lot of people who were on the fringe of society. I would never judge someone because they had a tattoo."

McBride's tattoo tolerance seems to have spread to the rest of the restaurant in-

dustry, although several people I talked to were hesitant to get full sleeves for fear of ink peeking out from behind their chef's whites. Just last year, *Food & Wine* published an angry letter to the editor complaining about the prominently placed tattooed chefs on the cover of their "Best New Chefs" issue (including one Nate Appleman, currently at the helm of the new Keith McNally project, Pulino's). Still, when you're watching *Top Chef* and other shows in the ever-expanding world of food television, it's hard not to notice how many chefs are proudly displaying their tats. Why so much ink behind the bar and in the kitchen? We decided to talk to seven people in the industry and get the story behind their tattoos. >>p22

Kitchen Ink
from p21

MATT ROBICELLI
 co-owner,
ROBICELLI'S
CUPCAKES
 (85 11 Third Avenue,
 Brooklyn)



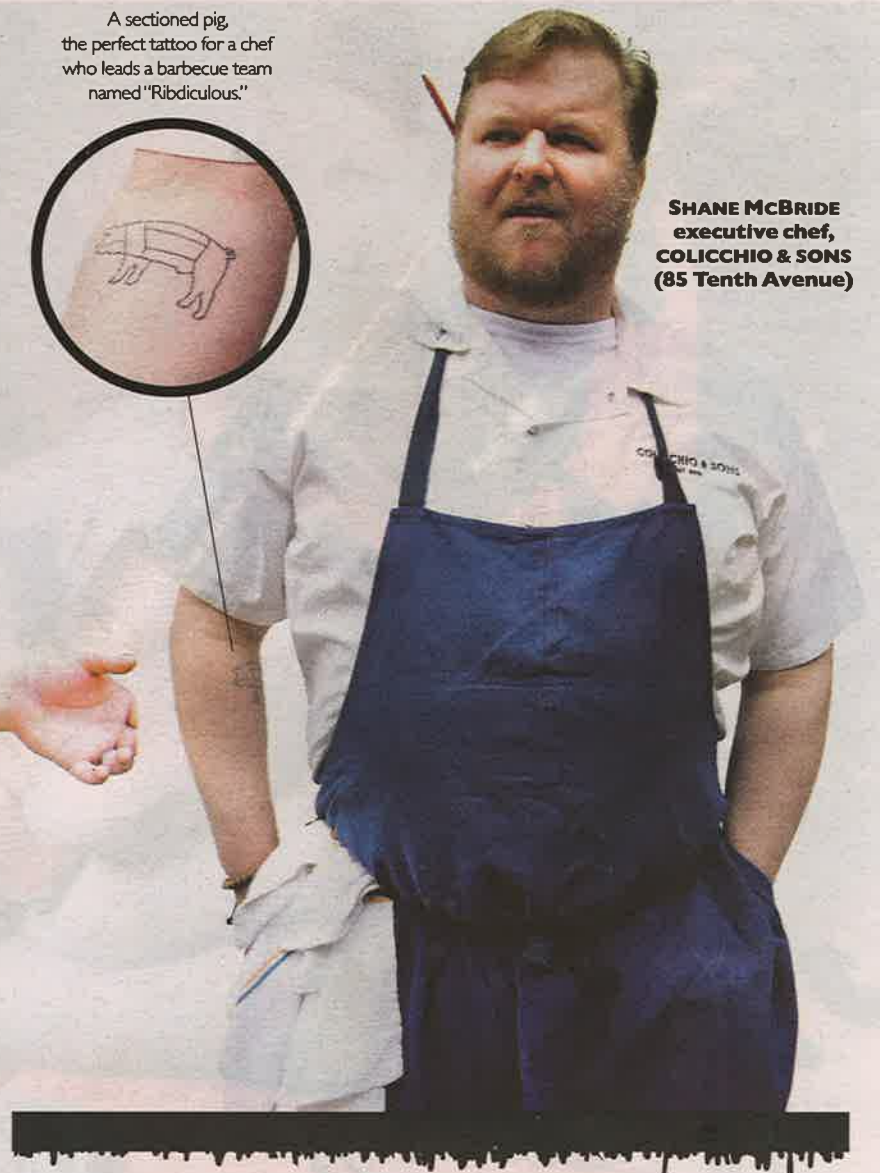
A bacon-wrapped heart, part one of a planned bacon-egg-and-cheese full-sleeve tattoo.



Matt Robicelli loves bacon. He has it tattooed on his left forearm, wrapped around a heart speared by a fork. And don't think he's just jumping on the bacon bandwagon—his mother's family actually owned a pig farm in Iowa. Not to mention that Robicelli is actually a fan of bacon-wrapped hearts: "If you've ever had bacon-wrapped rabbit hearts, they're delicious," he says. "When I worked at the Water Club, we'd make them as a special. I've also had bacon-wrapped duck hearts—they're phenomenal."

The tattoo (inked, ironically, by vegan tattoo artist Nacho from Brooklyn's Studio Enigma) is only the first part of a planned full-sleeve tattoo with a bacon-egg-and-cheese theme. Next on the agenda: Polynesian flowers done Sailor Jerry-style, with sunny-side-up eggs at their centers, with a box grater above showering the whole mess with different kinds of cheese. It might seem strange that Robicelli—a six-foot, 320-pound meat-loving dude—would go into the cupcake business, but once you see the list of baked treats he and his wife, Allison, have concocted, it starts to make sense. One of his most popular cupcakes is called the Elvis, which includes banana, peanut butter, and, yes, candied bacon.

A sectioned pig, the perfect tattoo for a chef who leads a barbecue team named "Ribdickulous."



SHANE MCBRIDE
 executive chef,
COLICCHIO & SONS
 (85 Tenth Avenue)

Chefs are a tough breed, enduring cuts and burns on a daily basis. But getting a tattoo on a freshly broken arm? That's hardcore. "I was kind of screwing around in the basement, riding somebody's skateboard because he didn't believe I could ride a skateboard," says McBride, recalling the fateful day three years ago. "He was like, 'You are too big, too old.'" McBride, who grew up skateboarding from as early as four years old in West Palm Beach, Florida, took him up on it. Bad idea: He hit a puddle and wiped out, landing on his arm.

The next day, he went to a tattoo parlor in his neighborhood, Astoria, and got a sectioned pig on his arm as he'd previously planned. But the pain was so bad that he went straight from the tattoo parlor to the hospital, where they told him his arm was broken.

He hopes eventually to complement the pig and the shamrock he got as a 17-year-old with a sectioned cow. Why did McBride get a sectioned pig tattoo in the first place?

"I tend to use a lot of pork in my cooking," he says. "Ribs, pork shoulder, bacon—there isn't any cut on the pig I don't like. Who can say no to crispy ears?"



This skeleton chef "watches my back," says the 23-year-old Hearst.

EMMA HEARST
chef and owner,
SORELLA
(95 Allen Street)



The raven-haired Emma Hearst has a bit of a gothic style. "I'll never have a color tattoo—black is my favorite shade." The 23-year-old's first tattoo was the word "soigné," the French culinary term roughly translated as "elegantly done," inked across her wrist shortly after she graduated from culinary school. It's part personal philosophy and part media-savviness: "I truly believe in the meaning of the word, but I got it in this specific place because I figured if my hand was ever photographed plating, it would look good in the photo."

Hearst (yes, of that Hearst family) also has her restaurant's logo on her arm, although it's a bit worn around the edges, as she scratched the newly minted tattoo while celebrating a four-star rave from *New York* magazine's *Underground Gourmet*. Her final food-related tattoo is a skeleton donning a chef's toque and carrying a knife, standing above the word "integrity," on her back, done, like all of her tattoos, at New York Adorned. Why does she think so many chefs have tattoos?

"I think we're all artsy people—we're all a little crazy. We like to express ourselves, whether with our food or with our bodies."

The phoenix, a symbol of rebirth, is a reminder of a tough year conquered.



This pinup girl, an homage to his girlfriend, represents the highs and lows of his relationship.



JOHNNY LUZZINI
executive
pastry chef,
JEAN GEORGES
(1 Central
Park West)



Of all the tattooed chefs in New York City, Johnny Luzzini might be the most famous. He got his first tattoo after a long journey backpacking across the world, during which he would volunteer in kitchens even if he didn't understand the language. That resulted in the Danish flag tattoo, a memento of a friend he'd made on the trip. Next up was a Mayan warrior, the symbol of a party he worked at the Palladium and a marker of the time he decided to finally quit the club circuit to pursue his culinary career full-time. There is a phoenix on his right arm, a symbol of rebirth inked after a tough year during which his mom fought cancer and his dad had a heart attack. He later got a large griffin on his arm, a tribute to his late mother, a wildlife rehabilitator who, like the griffin, was a guardian of sorts, taking care of sick animals in the Catskills until they could be released back into the wild. Both of his half-sleeves were done by Chris O'Donnell at New York Adorned, an artist he greatly respects: "I tell him the idea behind it and why I want it and let him do his art," Luzzini says. "I would hate for someone to come into the kitchen with a picture of a cake and a recipe. It's like, what do you need me for then? I find people that I respect and trust and put it in their hands." >> p25

Kitchen Ink
from p23

Jesse Schenker
executive chef,
Recette
(328 West 12th Street)



A human crêpinette featuring caul fat wrapped around a piece of meat with his favorite knife.



Jesse Schenker, an alum of **Gordon Ramsay's** the London NYC, takes the phrase "You are what you eat" further than most. His tattoo, which took more than eight hours to complete, is impressive: a piece of caul fat (the membrane surrounding a pig's internal organs) wrapped around a piece of meat—in this case, his entire forearm—punctuated by a slicer from Japanese knife-maker Misono.

"I just have an affinity for caul fat, the way it looks when it's stretched out," says Schenker. "It's almost like a web of fat. You wrap it around anything—meat, fish, duck, foie gras—and sear it. The classic French term is 'crêpinette.' " It's a technique he loves, but one he usually reserves only for the fall and winter, when game is more available.

He actually brought a piece of caul fat into **Addiction** on St. Mark's to show his tattoo artist what it looked like, thus beginning the two-and-a-half-year process. That's not the only meaty tattoo he has on his body. He also has a T-bone steak on his shoulder, which is being cooked by a flaming skull. What's next? He's half-jokingly considering getting a tattoo of his spinal cord over his spine.

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BRIAN SMITH
cook,
THE GOOD FORK
(391 Van Brunt Street,
Brooklyn)



The Swedish Chef juggles a carrot, tomato, and celery, along with his accidentally severed thumb.

The life of a cook is hard, whether he be human or Muppet. Such is the fate of the Swedish Chef, tattooed onto Brian Smith's stomach in 2001, who is depicted juggling his severed thumb along with various vegetables over the words "Born to Cook." Smith feels similarly fated to cook: His whole family was in the restaurant and bar business—his mother was a bartender, his stepfather a chef, his father a bartender, and his stepmother a hostess for 20 years. Smith started in the kitchen washing dishes at age 14, and when he found himself still in restaurants a decade later, he decided it was time to acknowledge his culinary history in ink form. He went to Tim Sellers, a/k/a Timmy Tatts, at Mark's Studio in State College, Pennsylvania, and had it all done in 45 minutes.

"I feel I'm pretty goofy," says Smith when asked if the tattoo reflected his demeanor on the line. "In the kitchen, things get very heated, literally and figuratively, and I see myself as kind of the clown trying to make people laugh and cool situations down."

>>p27

Kitchen Ink
from p25

BRIE HULING
bartender at **B BAR AND GRILL**
(40 East 4th Street) and
D.B.A. BROOKLYN (113 North
7th Street, Brooklyn)



A large artichoke, one of her favorite tattoos.



Peapods and a ladybug.



A caterpillar climbs atop a pumpkin.



A strawberry and one of Brie's many bees.



A radish creature.



Where's Waldo? There he is.



A cheeky "Grown in Oregon" tattoo reminds her of her roots.



"I've been a vegetarian for 15 years, so my tattoos are about my food politics, but also, each vegetable has a story about a person or experience in my life," says Brie Huling, who is covered just about everywhere with tattoos depicting artichokes, pea pods, horseradishes, and carrots, including one that is piloting a hot-air balloon. She also has "Grown in Oregon" stamped on her rear, a nod to her Eugene upbringing, and a sign of her casual and impulsive approach toward tattoos.

"I get them, maybe, when I'm bored, or when something bad happens in my life and I want to tell the story of whatever happened, but it's never really a premeditated thing," says Huling. "I don't want to get all wrapped up in thinking, 'Oh, this one thing is going to represent me for the rest of my life.'"

The South Williamsburg bartender/poet usually goes to her friend Steve Von Riepen, at Fun City Tattoo on St. Marks Place, to get her work done. Her favorite? A tattoo of martini olives on her collarbone, a tribute to her 90-year-old grandmother, affectionately nicknamed Miss Martini Mae.

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