

HOW I MADE IT: MARIO BATALI

Delicious adrenaline rush

ANDREA CHANG

The gig: Celebrity chef, restaurateur and television personality known for his fresh take on traditional Italian fare and his penchant for wearing orange Crocs. Mario Batali co-owns 15 restaurants in Los Angeles, Las Vegas and New York, including L.A. hot spots Pizzeria Mozza and Osteria Mozza, which he opened with business partners Nancy Silverton and Joe Bastianich.

The ponytailed chef, who can be seen on the Food Network's "Iron Chef America" and other television programs, also touts a line of products including cookbooks and kitchenware.

Education: Graduated from Rutgers University with a double major in Spanish theater and economics. Enrolled in Le Cordon Bleu in London but dropped out after 3½ months, a move he called "another example of my nascent stupidity. You should finish what you do."

First taste: While attending college, Batali got a job as a dishwasher at a pizzeria called Stuff Yer Face. He later became a pizza and stromboli maker, and said the experience got him hooked on the "adrenaline rush" of working in a kitchen.

Learning curve: As a young sous-chef at a London pub, Batali butted heads with renowned chef Marco Pierre White.

"He was a tempest; he was a storm brewing at all times," Batali said. "There's a well-documented incident where he threw a pan of risotto at me from 5 feet away. . . . In his opinion, the risotto wasn't right. I explained to him I was Italian and he was English, but he didn't like that."

Italian flair: After sharpening his skills at several establishments including hotel restaurants and a catering company, Batali headed to Italy when he was 29. For the next three years, he received



WALLY SKALIJ/Los Angeles Times

CHEF: Mario Batali began as a dishwasher. Now he co-owns 15 restaurants and appears on the Food Network.

culinary training as an unpaid cook at a restaurant in the tiny village of Borgo Capanne.

Big break: Batali borrowed \$20,000 from three friends to start Po, an Italian restaurant in Manhattan, with business partner Steven Crane. The pair leased a small, 34-seat space for \$3,000 a month and bought chairs, tables and other fixtures at a failed-restaurant auction. When Po opened in 1993, the menu featured a six-course *prix fixe* option for \$29 and pasta dishes for \$10.

"It was kind of a dreamy, hole-in-the-wall, sneaky Italian place that uptown people would tell some of their friends and not all of them because they didn't want them to discover it," said Batali, who has

sold his stake in the restaurant.

Essential ingredient: Extra virgin olive oil. "I use it in just about every single thing I ever make, including desserts."

Can't stomach: Durian. The tropical fruit "smells like a gas station bathroom in the summer," he said.

Mozza madness: With most of his restaurants in New York, Batali agreed to venture into the L.A. market to work with longtime friend Silverton. The Mozza restaurants opened to intense hype (the pizzeria debuted in 2006; the osteria followed the next year) and are still among the hardest reservations in town. This summer

Mozza 2 Go, a takeout and delivery service featuring pizzas and other Mozza favorites, opened next door.

Expansion: Batali will open two Mozza restaurants in Singapore next year with Silverton and Bastianich. They are also thinking about bringing a Pizzeria Mozza to Orange County and are brainstorming a new restaurant concept for Las Vegas, but Batali said he's "not one of those guys that wants to operate restaurants in every town in America."

Recession dining: "Our check averages are under \$100 in every restaurant," Batali said. "You can always come and get a \$15 or \$18 bowl of pasta and a salad and a glass of wine and get out of there for \$35. . . . We take great pains to make sure that the food is delicious, that it's fairly priced and that there's accessibility."

Personal: Batali, 49, splits his time between Greenwich Village and Northport, Mich., with his wife, Susi, and their sons, Benno and Leo.

Does Susi ever get to cook? "Get to cook? She doesn't want to cook," he said. "She makes my birthday cake every year — that's about the extent of it."

What's with the clogs? Batali is rarely seen without Crocs, which he called "the most comfortable shoes in the world." He owns 50 pairs — all orange, except for one red pair that he wore for a Bono charity event — and washes them in his dishwasher.

Key to Italian cooking: "It's less about the hand of the chef and more about the quality of the ingredients. The greatest dishes in Italian cooking have removed all that white noise and it's all about that little noodle and the perfect peas and the Parmesan," he said. "It's greatness without doing too much to it. If it's asparagus, I want it to taste like asparagus; if it's an apple, I want it to taste like an apple."

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LETTERS

Gas prices are high for profit's sake

Re: "Gasoline keeps rising in state," Sept. 15:

Isn't the real reason the producers are keeping inventories low to keep prices artificially high to increase profits? There is no reason for a 57-cent gap.

The real story is why the government allows this to happen, especially when energy prices had a lot to do with the collapse of the economy.

GREG VANIMAN
Glendora

Wall Street greed is despicable

Re: "Crisis has not altered Wall Street," Sept. 14:

I read with revulsion and despair the story of the wanton greed of the banking system giving billions in undeserved bonuses, a system that had failed and was then rescued by the federal government.

These people don't care about what is good for America. They lack virtue and are proving once again that without strong federal oversight we the people are at their mercy.

PAUL L. HOVSEPIAN
Sierra Madre

Let's not propose health co-ops

Re: Michael Hiltzik's business column "Will U.S. learn state's health lesson?" Sept. 14:

The column raises an important point about how, with minor changes, "you can turn a boon for the consumer into a windfall for big business."

The public option has support from three-fourths of the public, yet we hear from the political class that it would have a hard time passing.

If insurance lobbyists can squelch something the vast majority want, they can easily see to it that the design for co-ops is bad, noncompetitive and unregulated. The health insur-

ance industry is skilled at gaming the system (for example, offering insurance and then rescinding it when patients need it).

Let's not introduce co-ops, which rely on a lot of details that can be gamed. Let's get something simple that people want, a public option.

DAVID GREENE
San Pedro

Stealing images is easier than ever

Re: David Lazarus' consumer column "Post a photo, pay the penalty," Sept. 13:

As a photographer, my income comes from licensing my intellectual property. It is called property because it belongs to someone, like a car or a house. It is made by an artist, a photographer or other creator using imagination, talent and, in most cases, hard work.

But it seems that with intellectual property, the morality of negotiating and agreeing between equals has changed. With the increasing ease of swiping work on the Internet, many people seem to think, "If I see it, if I want it, I can have it, without paying the person who legally owns it."

LEIF SKOOGFORS
Lansdale

The amount you suggest as a penalty for failing to pay for an image — "five times the original licensing fee" — is not much of a punishment and doesn't compensate the company for the theft of intellectual property. That low of a punishment would only encourage more theft. The small-business owner who was fined by Getty Images should have gone back to the Web designer and got the money from them or taken them to small claims court.

RICK SMITH
Laguna Beach

Coldwell agent clarifies comment

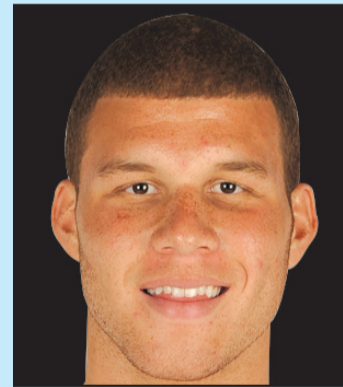
Re: "Tough stand on Malibu home," Sept. 12:

In a story about a Wells Fargo executive's alleged personal use of a bank-owned home, I was quoted as saying I [See Letters, Page B7]

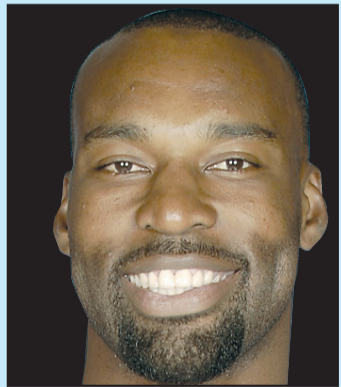
CLIPPERS vs. MACCABI

October 20, 2009
at Staples Center

TEL AVIV



Blake Griffin
LA Clippers



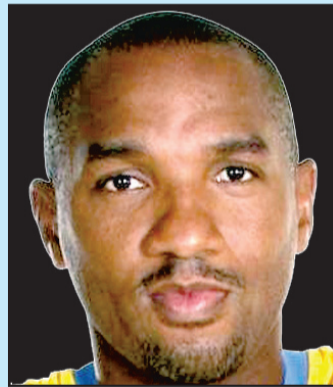
Baron Davis
LA Clippers



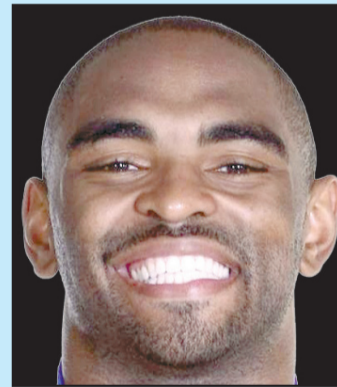
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