



Photo © Andrew Meade

F&W Star Chef

Restaurant: MC Kitchen, Miami

Experience: Tra Vigne, St. Helena, CA; Ajax Tavern, D19, Ellina, Aspen, CO; DeVito South Beach, Miami

Education: Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, NY

What recipe are you most famous for?

My octopus—it's quickly seared and braised, then charred with a lot of chile, garlic and sherry vinegar. We serve it with a black risotto cake, pancetta and a frisée salad. Mario Batali showed me how to cook octopus properly years ago. He was eating at Ajax Tavern and he had my octopus dish. He said, "This is amazing but I can show you a way to take it over the top." I was boiling the octopus, adding too much water and cooking it for longer than it needed. He showed me how to sear and bake it dry. Since that day 15 years ago I have never cooked octopus any other way.

What dish really tells us your story as a chef?

My farm egg bruschetta at MC Kitchen really speaks to the way I work to elevate Italian flavors while keeping them simple. The dish starts with a grilled ciabatta bruschetta brushed with really good olive oil. On top is a fresh braised artichoke heart; inside the heart sits a soft poached egg with a creamy Parmesan sauce and black truffles. I remember being young and cleaning tons of artichokes with my grandmother and great grandmother. We'd eat them whole, but I like to think this dish is an extension of that history.

What is your favorite cookbook of all time?

I would have to say the *Le Bernardin Cookbook*. I just love the simplicity of Eric Ripert's style of cooking. He manages to get across such bold flavors while using only two or three ingredients. It's inspiring to see food that is so clean.

What is your secret-weapon ingredient?

Lemon brings out such a bright flavor in basically everything—fish, meat, salad, vegetables, soup. At MC Kitchen we even serve our porterhouse steak with a roasted lemon along with a salsa verde. When you squeeze the citrus over the sauce and the meat it almost creates a vinaigrette that cuts all that fattiness.

Name one indispensable store-bought ingredient.

Of course I'd have to say olive oil. I love straight unfiltered, unblended Italian oils. They have that deep green flavor—that earthiness and a little bit of bitterness. I use unfiltered [Olio Verde](#), and I'll drizzle that over a piece of fish, on arugula or even in whipped cream to give it a luxurious texture and flavor.

What's your favorite food letter of the alphabet?

I'd have to say S: Salt, sardines, salsa, salami, saltimbocca and Sauvignon Blanc.

If you could invest in a dream project, what would it be?

I would build a brew tavern where we could make beer in our own tanks and have tap lines filtered through the restaurant for the guests to see. I'd cook down-to-earth American pub food—imagine clams steamed in beer with great sausage and a big old hunk of garlic bread.

What is your current food obsession?

I am so obsessed with cheese right now. I love making it: ricotta, mascarpone, fresh mozzarella, robiola and burrata. I like that you can create your own consistency and tailor a cheese to your taste if you prefer something creamier, saltier or sweeter.

What is your favorite online shop?

I like [The Chefs' Warehouse](#). You can get boutique items that you can't find anywhere else very easily delivered to you. My recent find was organic red risotto, which is impossible to get in Miami. It has this nutty, rich flavor, and it is actually a wild rice not an arborio, so it isn't overly starchy.

