

TOP CHEF *top* 10



STREET ART “When I was looking at spaces for Ink, I got really into street art. But I don’t map it out. That makes it more fun when I find something like a Banksy” (above).



Michael Voltaggio

As the Top Chef Season 6 winner prepares to open Ink (he spells it “ink.”) in Los Angeles and publish his first cookbook, he shares 10 obsessions with *EW*’s Kate Krader and tells her baking fish in a salt crust is sexy.

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SALT-CRUSTED SNAPPER WITH EGGPLANT-RAISIN PUREE (RECIPE, P. 225)

6 PRESSURE COOKER “I’m obsessed. I’m cooking all my sauces in it, I’m cooking seeds and nuts, pretty much anything I can put in there. You get such clean flavor so fast.”

7 RAP & REGGAE “Matisyahu (right) gave one of the better concerts I’ve seen in my life. He’s the Hasidic rapper and reggae artist; his live show was unexpected and crazy.”



8 COMFORT FOOD “We’re cooking a lot of pig ears and feet. Ink’s comforting cuts are short ribs and wings, not steak and chicken breast.”

9 REGRET “I wish I’d learned to play an instrument. There’s a piano in the Charlotte, North Carolina, airport, right near the food court. Random people sit down and play and fill the airport with music. I always wish I could just sit down at that piano and start playing.”

1

SNEAKERS “I wear slip-on Vans a lot. I’ve been traveling so much recently, and they’re my airport shoes. They’re easy to get on and off when I go through security.”



2 TATTOOS “I only have eight tattoos on my left arm. Jason at Tattoo Lounge in Venice, California, did four of them. He’ll end up filling in my whole arm.”



4 SALT-CRUSTED SNAPPER “There’s something sexy about baking a whole fish in a big pile of salt. And then cracking into the salt crust and having the fish be perfectly cooked and seasoned inside.”

5 CONDIMENTS “I like Sriracha hot sauce, but only a dot of it. I’m not big on superspicy. I like mayonnaise, I like mustard, and pickles are definitely necessary for me when it comes to sandwiches.”



SUSHI “I always start with sashimi. Then I ease into nigiri (fish with rice) based on the sashimi I liked best. My best sushi was at Urasawa in L.A.”

FOOD PHOTOGRAPH: KATE MATHIS; FOOD STYLIST: VIVIAN LUI; PROP STYLIST: STELLA YOON. PHOTOGRAPHS: PEDEN & MUNK (VOLTAGGIO), COURTESY OF VANS (VANS), CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY (STREET ART), COURTESY OF HUY FONG (SRIRACHA), LARRY MARANO/GETTY (MATISYAHU), SHUTTERSTOCK (SUSHI)

Salt-Crusted Snapper with Eggplant-Raisin Puree

📷 PAGE TKTk

ACTIVE: 30 MIN; TOTAL: 1 HR 45 MIN

4 SERVINGS

Three 4-inch cinnamon sticks

1 medium eggplant (1 pound)

¼ cup golden raisins

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Sea salt

Cayenne pepper

3 pounds kosher salt

2 cups water

One 2-pound cleaned red snapper

2 bay leaves

½ lemon, preferably Meyer lemon,
cut into wedges

1. Preheat the oven to 400°. Poke the cinnamon into the eggplant. Roast the eggplant on a baking sheet until tender, about 50 minutes. Transfer the eggplant to a bowl, cover with plastic wrap and let cool slightly. Discard the cinnamon and peel the eggplant.

2. In a microwave-safe bowl, cover the raisins with water and microwave at high power until plumped, about 30 seconds. Drain the raisins and transfer them to a blender. Add the roasted eggplant and the olive oil and puree until smooth. Season the puree with sea salt and cayenne.

3. In a bowl, mix the kosher salt with the water until it is the consistency of moist sand. On a parchment paper-lined baking sheet, mound one-fourth of the salt slightly larger than the fish. Lay the fish on the salt and fill its cavity with the bay leaves and lemon wedges. Poke a short skewer into the thickest part of the fish, just behind the head. Pack the remaining kosher salt over and around the fish to enclose it; leave the skewer visible.

4. Bake the fish for about 35 minutes, until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the skewer hole registers 135°. Let the fish rest for 5 minutes; crack and remove the salt crust. Serve the fish without the skin, with the eggplant puree alongside.

SERVE WITH Arugula salad.

WINE *Crisp Provençal rosé: 2010 Com-manderie de la Bargemone.* ●

*Ink, 8360 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles;
mvink.com.*