



November 2010

Michael Voltaggio's Canned Tuna 2010

6 two-ounce pieces high-quality tuna
Maldon sea salt, to taste
1 teaspoon piment d'Espelette
1 canning jar
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 bunch basil leaves
2 cups extra virgin olive oil

Preparation: Season tuna with salt and piment d'Espelette and place in canning jar. Place the garlic and basil in the jar. Heat oil to 150°F. Pour the hot oil in the jar so that the tuna is submerged in oil. Leave out until it is room temperature, then seal and place the jar in the refrigerator overnight.

Suggested meal: Slice bread and tomatoes. Remove tuna from the jar and scrape off most of the oil. Flake the tuna. Spread some vanilla mayo (recipe at inkedmag.com) on the bread. Lay slices of tuna over mayo and place a slice of tomato on the tuna. Lay a few pickles over the tomato. Season with Maldon sea salt. Add another slice of bread and enjoy the best tuna sandwich ever!



MICHAEL VOLTAGGIO

Working in a hotel or restaurant basically breaks down like this: There's the front room staff of fawning maitre d's, suave managers, and polished hostesses, and there's the back room staff, including the (more often than not) tattooed guys and girls working in the kitchen. And then there's Los Angeles-based chef Michael Voltaggio, a back room guy who's been thrust into a front room situation since capturing the grand prize in Bravo's Emmy-winning season of *Top Chef*. "I'm a cook, not a 'personality,'" he says, aware how ironic the statement sounds considering that he's making it in the swanky Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel while waiting to have his photograph taken by someone who routinely shoots people with last names like Affleck and Phoenix. "Really, I just like to make food that tastes good," he explains. "I started working in kitchens when I was 15 and I've worked hard for everything I've earned ... I haven't even had my own restaurant yet."

That'll change in early 2011, when he plans to open his first restaurant with his chef de cuisine, Cole Dickinson (pictured on page 4), in Los Angeles—a city where people like to call restaurants "projects." But despite the attention and high-profile locale, there are signs Voltaggio's brand won't end up Batalified or Riperted into some slick, celebrity chef operation. For example, after incorporating MV Ink, a company that will handle "lifestyle stuff" and the restaurant—which he plans to make "more accessible and affordable than the other places I've worked"—he promptly had the name of it tattooed on his arm. "I just got the tattoo yesterday," he says excitedly. "It's *Ink*, which is my little play on incorporated, because I'm more inked than an Inc., you know?"

A glance at the enviable collection of tattoos under his chef's whites is all

it takes to know exactly what he means. There are sentimental pieces, like the lion representing one of his daughters (a Leo) and the Day of the Dead-style ram's head in honor of his other daughter (an Aries), as well as more intricate designs, like the koi fish on his arm, which looks a hell of a lot better than the shamrock he got on his leg when he was 15. And, of course, there are the food-related tattoos, including the little fork and knife on his left hand that resembles a prison-yard special and a dolled-up Morton salt umbrella girl on his left biceps, which was done by Jason Stores at the Tattoo Lounge in Mar Vista, CA. "Jason's amazing; he gave her some character, like fishnets and tattoos," he says of the piece, which is not just an homage to his favorite ingredient, but also a reminder to coworkers. "This guy used to work to the left of me on the line and he would always forget to season," he says incredulously. "I would just hold her up when that happened. ... I mean, how do you forget to put salt on your food?"

Anyone who's watched *Top Chef* or eaten at Pasadena's Langham Huntington Dining Room when Voltaggio was chef de cuisine knows perfect seasoning is just one small step in the meticulous process he uses to create inventive dishes that look like works of art and actually taste damn good too. "I like to challenge myself," he says. "Like, tell me what ingredient you *don't* like and I'll find a way to make you like it." He thinks about this some more. "You know, it's sort of like tattooing. You bring an idea to your artist and let them interpret it, draw it, and give it back to you as this piece of art for your body. Well, give me an idea for a meal, even if it's just ham and cheese, and I want to be able to turn it around and make it into something amazing for you." —Jennifer Goldstein