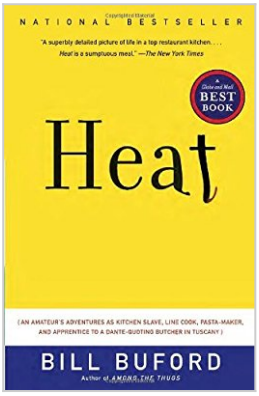

Heat: An Amateur's Adventures as Kitchen Slave, Line Cook, Pasta-Maker, and Apprentice to a Dante-Quoting Butcher in Tuscany

By Bill Buford

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Bill started out of curiosity, of wanting to know how professional chefs cooked and in what ways that differed from what home cooks do. But he quickly became obsessed, and ended up spending a year “locked inside a hot, windowless room,” living “a weirdo life” while going through “kitchen boot camp” -- “a long, arduous, confidence-bashing, profoundly humiliating experience.”

His love of Italian food then propelled him on journeys further afield: to Italy, to discover the secrets of pasta-making and, finally, how to properly slaughter a pig. Throughout, Buford stunningly details the complex aspects of Italian cooking and its long history, creating an engrossing narrative stuffed with insight and humor.

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Editorial Review

Review

“[Buford] carries on the Hemingway tradition in American letters. Men come to know themselves and achieve transcendence through physical suffering . . . Buford develops a superbly detailed picture of life in a top restaurant kitchen and the way professional chefs and their minions operate. It is every bit as revealing as Anthony Bourdain’s *Kitchen Confidential*, with less of the bombast and posturing . . . Buford struck pure gold in the hard-living, frantic, endlessly quotable Batali, [who] is exuberant, conniving, creatively profane and ingenious when it comes to devising new dishes and selling them to the public . . . [Buford] picks up on the intricate sociology of the kitchen and expertly conveys the interplay of ambition, jealousy, dedication and hard-earned craft . . . *Heat* is a sumptuous meal.”–William Grimes, *New York Times*“Bill Buford has arrived to chew the fat in delightful fashion, skewering conventional cooking wisdom while enjoying (enduring?) several nerve-racking apprenticeships . . . His coach, mentor, and, yes, warden is Mario Batali, a garrulous, demanding man who proves to be a dazzling character. Batali is lively, lewd, and shrewd . . . [Buford] benefits from Batali’s bombast as well as his own wry mixture of zeal and self-flagellation . . . As for *Heat,* its meaty morsels will leave most readers pining for a second helping.”–Erik Spanberg, *Christian Science Monitor*“Buford is used to being cutting edge, but he had to acquire a new set of blades to apprentice himself to master chef Mario Batali . . . His play-by-play descriptions of kitchen culture are marinated in a tangy literary sauce.”–*O, The Oprah Magazine*“*Heat* boasts excellent writing, colorful rogues and highly amusing scenes . . . Buford is a talented writer and he offers up succulent nuggets that may surprise even veteran foodies and devotees of Italian cuisine.”–Richard Vines, *Bloomberg*“At an age when other men’s thoughts might be turning to the golf range, [Buford] signed on to the kitchen range . . . Those familiar with the cuddly public persona of ‘Molto Mario,’ the modern-day Falstaff of the Food Network . . . will find a more complex figure in *Heat.* In Mr. Buford’s portrait, Mr. Batali is a combustible mix of high-testosterone swagger and outrageous appetites, generous, maniacal, bullying, foulmouthed–part genius and part madman . . . Buford is a graceful, vivid writer, and his descriptions of the characters he meets–and the food he prepares and eats–are a joy to read.”–Moira Hodgson, *Wall Street Journal*“Give thanks [for] *Heat,* a funny, self-deprecating, insightful book about [Buford’s] quest for authenticity, at least the Italian version . . . The depths of cookery’s mysteries yield several epiphanies–the ineluctable glories of pasta water, the nature of meat on the hoof, why polenta shouldn’t be stirred . . . His compulsively readable story is a reminder and a guide to what eaters should enjoy, hobbyists should aim to better appreciate, and food professionals, miraculously, can accomplish night after night.”–Donna Bowman, *The Onion*“This is a beautiful, infectious book about disappearing into the apparently infinite complexities of Italian food. It's participatory journalism to the point where, if you’re at all interested in food, it makes you want to participate, too . . . It’s not just food itself, however, that Buford writes about and loves . . . *Heat* is really a story about people, which is why it’s at its best when describing the gossipy dramas and odd personalities in the kitchen at Babbo . . . But what has stayed with me even more than the kitchen soap operas are the quiet revelations Buford discovers as he studies while he chops and cooks and hammers.”–Matthew MacAllester, *Newsday*“Delightful . . . [A] charming, crazy book . . . Buford never directly explains why the chef's life seemed so irresistible to him, but he shows you, page by delicious page, why the whole enterprise is so seductive . . . Buford is a lovely, precise writer about cooking . . . *Heat* lets readers share [his] adoration for Italian food . . . Show-stopping.”–Warren Bass, *Washington Post Book World*“Funny, passionate, and beautifully written . . . Buford’s narrative is a delightful meal of savory flavors. [He] uncovers the richness, history, and small-scale charm of Italian cooking . . . Buford may be a culinary apprentice, but he’s a master prose stylist. His descriptions of preparing food, from braised spare ribs to polenta to pasta, are marvelous in their clarity and vivid, sensuous detail. Buford clearly loves food and the people who help him understand it, and this love

suffuses every page. *Heat* is more than just a tasty treat; it's a memorable meal made with passion and served con brio."–Chuck Leddy, *Boston Globe*"Fiery . . . Buford perfectly captures the backstage intensity of a professional kitchen and the people who run it . . . The Babbo kitchen Buford describes seems at times like an NFL locker room . . . His immersion in this world taught him a good deal and gives him authority far beyond the mere observer or dilettante. He writes in pleasurable detail about polenta, linguine with clams and short ribs (for which he provides a terrific recipe) . . . However uncertain he is of his culinary skills, Buford needn't worry about his exceptional gift of writing words to esteem and savor."–David Takami, *Seattle Times*"It would be a shame if nonfoodies passed on the book, because its interest extends far beyond the culinary . . . [Buford's] literary persona is a latter-day Candide . . . *Heat* delivers on its initial promise–we get gossip, we get passion and hilarity, fear and loathing–and then hands us complimentary dessert. With any luck, we won't have to wait fifteen more years for Buford to dazzle us again."–Roger Downey, *Seattle Weekly*"*Heat* is Buford's witty, literate and appetizing account of his experience studying under several culinary masters. Buford is the ideal guide for a tour of this gastronomic world. Using a conversational style, a keen reporter's eye, and a good sense of humor and timing, he leads readers on a journey that soon leaves Babbo and travels to England and Italy . . . Buford is not the first person to chronicle life inside a busy Manhattan restaurant . . . But [other] accounts did not include the towering figure of Batali . . . [Buford] knows how to keep the story moving along, and knows when to insert a quip or an incredulous question . . . Entertaining."–Connor Ennis, *Associated Press*"Buford got to do what every serious amateur chef dreams of . . . *Heat* teems with hilariously humiliating tales of chopped carrots, skinned lambs tongues and self-immolation . . . Buford's tantalizing descriptions of preparing *soppressata* and tortellini will make even the culinary-challenged salivate. *Mangia!*"–Nicki Gostin, *Newsweek*"Wonderfully thoughtful and personal."–*Entertainment Weekly*"A food lover's adventure story . . . Buford captures all the rock 'n' roll, playboy attitude of [Batali,] the notorious flame-haired, orange-clogged chef, [and] works his way up to a decent stint as a line cook–brief and hilariously brutal, but flecked with enough brilliant, adrenaline-filled moments to get him hooked . . . Interspersed with his gleeful trials as a clumsy pasta student in an Emilian hill town near Bologna and a blood-soaked butcher's helper in Tuscany, Buford searches for the original egg-pasta recipe and disassembles an entire adult pig in his New York kitchen . . . Overly romantic? Maybe, but delightfully so."–Alison Neumer Lara, *Chicago Tribune*"A tour de force piece of immersion reportage . . . Deliciously written." –Stephen J. Lyons, *Chicago Sun-Times*"A marvel, amazing . . . [Buford] gets everyone's story of ambition and heartbreak, including the dishwashers' . . . Wonderful . . . Genuinely lip-smacking–Nicholson Baker's *U and I* meets meticulous *Vogue* food writer Jeffrey Steingarten. Don't read it with an empty larder."–Alexandra Jacobs, *New York Observer* "Exuberant, hilarious, glorying in its rich and arcane subject matter, *Heat* is Plimpton-esque immersion journalism . . . Batali is only one of the several alpha males Buford renders with relish . . . Fascinating . . . By the end of this full-to-bursting, hugely entertaining and moving book, Buford has progressed from interloper to insider, from amateur to passable professional. He has become an incarnation of treasured culinary arts, thus more physically fulfilled and more fully human . . . With *Heat,* we have a writer lighting on the subject of a lifetime."–Michelle Huneven, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*"Not since M.F.K. Fisher's youthful account of dinner in Dijon with her new lover where she recalled every nuanced dish with the same erotic intensity as the lovemaking that was going on simultaneously and unmentioned in her head, have I read such sultry descriptions as Buford's of food . . . Many will enjoy for its own sake Buford's well-told account of his midlife apprenticeship to a famous restaurant in New York, the current world capital of extravagant cuisine. What makes his book unusual within its genre, apart from the quality of its prose, is that he takes more pleasure in watching cooks work than in savoring their dishes . . . In living memory New York has not seen Batali's equal, nor is it likely that such a bubbling ferment of genius, taste, enthusiasm, steely resolve, and Rabelaisian appetite will soon come this way again . . . Self-deprecating as he presents himself in his book, [Buford] is an avid observer and quick to master the essential techniques . . . Readers will be fascinated, as I was, by what Buford learned."–Jason Epstein, *New York Review of Books*"Soulful . . . [*Heat*] is part memoir, part biography and part tutorial, and its deftly intertwining narratives include everything from high-end restaurant gossip and

kitchen secrets to a passionate homage to the rapidly declining traditions of handmade food. [Buford] started out, he says, as a “tourist” who wanted to learn some basic skills and tell the tale. He does tell it, beautifully, but [now] he is a proud “member” of the kitchen who has been forever changed . . . These first fast-paced chapters read almost like a thriller . . . The plot clips along, but I found myself reading slowly because there is so much information on every page . . . There is something here for everyone. Anyone who enjoys characters will be drawn into the dramas of the Babbo kitchen cast . . . Dinner party cooks will understand the drive toward learning more and the gratification that derives from making other people happy. Those of us in our 40’s will certainly understand the allure of re-examining your life and career, not to mention the romance of actually changing it, dramatically. Finally, many of us will also be consumed by jealousy. *Heat* is a remarkable journey–I only wish I’d thought to make it.”–Julia Reed, *The New York Times Book Review*“Buford’s mastery of the stove is exceeded only by his deft handling of English prose.”–*Booklist*“It should come as no surprise that Bill Buford has written a dazzling book. He was legendary as an editor and has metamorphisized into an outstanding writer. The hellish and–he somehow convinces you–sexy joy of being in a top of the line restaurant kitchen, the insane pressure, physical exhaustion, and unexpressed comradeship, as if in an endless boot camp, is brilliantly described. You will learn a lot about food, but the book is worth reading for its portraits alone, sometimes in quick slashes, sometimes much more. Foremost, there is Mario Batali, the celebrity chef of Babbo; Marco Pierre White, the brutal British chef and restaurant owner; an incredible Tuscan butcher named Dario Cecchini and, like a Bruegal, countless others. Above all, there is the passion of Buford himself who, as a complete amateur, leapt wildly into the life, drenching himself in it for months on end, slaving, working, slowly learning, and this book is his glory.”–James Salter, author of *Burning the Days*“Buford’s book starts smartly--he first met dynamic celebrity chef Mario Batali at a dinner party at his own home, where Batali sparkled until 3 a.m.--and continues at a fast clip as he conceived the notion of becoming Batali’s “kitchen slave.” Buford wanted to profile Batali for the *New Yorker* but also wanted to learn about cooking; he would be a “journalist-tourist” in the boot camp of a “kitchen genius.” His subject became an obsession, and over the next three years, he investigated a rich menu of subjects: what makes a three-star restaurant work; what it takes to be a TV food star; the techniques and history of Italian cooking . . . A wonderfully detailed and highly amusing book.”–*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)“If it’s gusto you’re after, you’ve come to the right book. If, like me, you’re a wine and food ignoramus, but love the literature, prepare, then, to drool. There are other behind-the-scene-at-restaurant books but none like this where its author, obsessed, shuttles between New York and Tuscany. Bill Buford isn’t content to tell us chef stories. He tells us about the one-day sausage-making course he took at New York University — the best college course he ever took in his life. In Italy he masters the art of pig butchery and how Italians eat every part of the pig but the oink. There are chapters on polenta, risotto, pasta in general. (Did you know there’s a pasta museum in Rome? Just one of those tasty nuggets you can throw out at your next dinner party.) He doesn’t simply show you how to cook risotto. He gives you a history. (If he cooked an egg he’d have to give you the history of eggs all the way back to the Garden of Eden.) Along the way he introduces us to the wildest cast of characters ever encountered in a book on food: Marco Pierre White, Jeremiah Tower, Mario Batali, Dario Cecchini—a rowdy, randy, bullying, oeniphilic, carnivorous bunch, Mr. Buford not least among them. He, Quixote in the kitchen, has written a book that pulses on every page with passion and high spirits. If you know people who have lost their appetite for food or life itself, give them *Heat*, and watch them rise from the bed, their cheeks flushed, their bellies agrowl with hunger.”–Frank McCourt, author of *Angela’s Ashes*“I have never read a funnier or more authentic account of the making of a serious cook. Give Mr. Buford three stars.”–Peter Mayle, author of *A Year in Provence*“It is no small accomplishment for a “civilian” of Buford’s relatively advanced years to survive the rigors of the professional kitchen, much less describe them in such lively and fascinating manner, but the real towering achievement of *Heat* is that the author, alone among writers, has captured the True Magnificence of Mario Batali–in all his Falstaffian glory–and the mad, driven brilliance of Marco Pierre White. An all-too-rare description of the real business of cooking, its characters and its subculture. I lingered over every sentence like a heavily truffled risotto.”–Anthony Bourdain, author of *Kitchen Confidential*“Bill Buford jumps into

the Italian kitchen world of New York and Tuscany as a can-do amateur (and crisp writer) and peels off the lid. What a cast of characters he finds! The descriptions of the food and people are rich, but the passionate tale is bittersweet as we view the lives of the circus performers backstage."–Mireille Guiliano, author of *French Women Don't Get Fat*

About the Author

BILL BUFORD is a Staff Writer and European Correspondent for *The New Yorker*, before which he was the Fiction Editor of the magazine for eight years. Before that he edited *Granta* magazine for sixteen years and, in 1989, became the publisher of Granta Books. He has edited three anthologies: *The Best of Granta Travel*, *The Best of Granta Reportage*, and *The Granta Book of the Family*, and is also the author of *Among the Thugs*. Born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Buford grew up in California and was educated at the University of California at Berkeley and at Kings College, Cambridge. He lives in New York City with his wife, Jessica Green.

Linguine with Clams

If you're tempted to make linguine with clams according to the kitchen's preparation, you should understand that the only ingredient that's measured is the pasta. (A serving is four ounces.) Everything else is what you pick up with your fingertips, and it's either a small pinch or a large pinch or something in between: not helpful, but that, alas, is the way quantities are determined in a restaurant.

The downside of measuring by hand is what happens to the hands. At the end of an evening your fingertips are irretrievably stained with some very heady aromatics, and there's nothing you can do to eliminate them. You wash your hands. You soak them. You shower, you scrub them again. The next day, they still stink of onion, garlic, and pork fat, and, convinced that everyone around you is picking up the smell, you ram them into your pockets, maniacally rubbing your fingers against each other like an obsessive-compulsive Lady Macbeth.

Ingredients

small pinch of chopped garlic
small pinch of chili flakes
medium pinch of chopped onion
medium pinch of pancetta
olive oil
butter
white wine
4 oz. linguine per serving
A big handful of clams
parsley

NOTE: the ingredients and preparations in this recipe are approximate—experiment with proportions to make it to your taste.

Begin by roasting small pinches of garlic and chili flakes and medium pinches of the onion and pancetta in a

hot pan with olive oil. Hot oil accelerates the cooking process,and the moment everything gets soft you pour it away (holding back the contents with your tongs) and add a slap of butter and a splash of white wine, which stops the cooking. This is Stage One—and you are left with the familiar messy buttery mush—but already you've added two things you'd never see in Italy: butter (seafood with butter—or any other dairy ingredient—verges on culinary blasphemy) and pancetta, because, according to Mario, pork and shellfish are an eternal combination found in many other places: in Portugal, in amêijoas na cataplana (clams and ham); or in Spain, in a paella (chorizo and scallops); or in the United States, in the Italian-American clams casino, even though none of those places happens to be in Italy.

In Stage Two, you drop the pasta in boiling water and take your messy buttery pan and fill it with a big handful of clams and put it on the highest possible flame. The objective is to cook them fast—they'll start opening after three or four minutes, when you give the pan a swirl, mixing the shellfish juice with the buttery porky white wine emulsion. At six minutes and thirty seconds, you use your tongs to pull your noodles out and drop them into your pan—all that starchy pasta water slopping in with them is still a good thing; give the pan another swirl; flip it; swirl it again to ensure that the pasta is covered by the sauce. If it looks dry, add another splash of pasta water; if too wet, pour some out. You then let the thing cook away for another half minute or so, swirling, swirling, until the sauce streaks across the bottom of the pan, splash it with olive oil and sprinkle it with parsley: dinner.

The first glimpse I had of what Mario Batali's friends had described to me as the "myth of Mario" was on a cold Saturday night in January 2002, when I invited him to a birthday dinner. Batali, the chef and co-owner of Babbo, an Italian restaurant in Manhattan, is such a famous and proficient cook that he's rarely invited to people's homes for a meal, he told me, and he went out of his way to be a grateful guest. He arrived bearing his own quince-flavored grappa (the rough, distilled end-of-harvest grape juices rendered almost drinkable by the addition of the fruit); a jar of homemade nocino (same principle, but with walnuts); an armful of wine; and a white, dense slab of lardo—literally, the raw "lardy" back of a very fat pig, one he'd cured himself with herbs and salt. I was what might generously be described as an enthusiastic cook, more confident than competent (that is, keen but fundamentally clueless), and to this day I am astonished that I had the nerve to ask over someone of Batali's reputation, along with six guests who thought they'd have an amusing evening witnessing my humiliation. (Mario was a friend of the birthday friend, so I'd thought—why not invite him, too?—but when, wonder of wonders, he then accepted and I told my wife, Jessica, she was apoplectic with wonder: "What in the world were you thinking of, inviting a famous chef to our apartment for dinner? Now what are we going to do?")

In the event, there was little comedy, mainly because Mario didn't give me a chance. Shortly after my being instructed that only a moron would let his meat rest by wrapping it in foil after cooking it, I cheerfully gave up and let Batali tell me what to do. By then he'd taken over the evening, anyway. Not long into it, he'd cut the lardo into thin slices and, with a startling flourish of intimacy, laid them individually on our tongues, whispering that we needed to let the fat melt in our mouths to appreciate its intensity. The lardo was from a pig that, in the last months of its seven-hundred-and-fifty-pound life, had lived on apples, walnuts, and cream ("The best song sung in the key of pig"), and Mario convinced us that, as the fat dissolved, we'd detect the flavors of the animal's happy diet—there, in the back of the mouth. No one that evening had knowingly eaten pure fat before ("At the restaurant, I tell the waiters to call it prosciutto bianco"), and by the time Mario had persuaded us to a third helping everyone's heart was racing. Batali was an impressively dedicated

drinker—he mentioned in passing that, on trips to Italy made with his Babbo co-owner, Joe Bastianich, the two of them had been known to put away a case of wine during an evening meal—and while I don't think that any of us drank anything like that, we were, by now, very thirsty (the lardo, the salt, the human heat of so much jollity) and, cheered on, found ourselves knocking back more and more. I don't know. I don't really remember. There were also the grappa and the nocino, and one of my last images is of Batali at three in the morning—a stoutly round man with his back dangerously arched, his eyes closed, a long red ponytail swinging rhythmically behind him, an unlit cigarette dangling from his mouth, his red Converse high-tops pounding the floor—playing air guitar to Neil Young's "Southern Man." Batali was forty-one, and I remember thinking it had been a long time since I'd seen a grown man play air guitar. He then found the soundtrack for Buena Vista Social Club, tried to salsa with one of the women guests (who promptly fell over a sofa), moved on to her boyfriend, who was unresponsive, put on a Tom Waits CD instead, and sang along as he washed the dishes and swept the floor. He reminded me of an arrangement we'd made for the next day—when I'd invited Batali to dinner, he'd reciprocated by asking me to join him at a New York Giants football game, tickets courtesy of the commissioner of the NFL, who had just eaten at Babbo—and then disappeared with three of my friends, assuring them that, with his back-of-the-hand knowledge of downtown establishments open until five, he'd find a place to continue the evening. They ended up at Marylou's in the Village—in Batali's description, "A wise guy joint where you can get anything at any time of night, and none of it good."

It was daylight when Batali got home. I learned this from his building superintendent the next morning, as the two of us tried to get Batali to wake up—the commissioner's driver was waiting outside. When Batali finally appeared, forty-five minutes later, he was momentarily perplexed, standing in the doorway of his apartment in his underwear and wondering why I was there, too. (Batali has a remarkable girth, and it was startling to see him clad so.) Then, in minutes, he transformed himself into what I would come to know as the Batali look: the shorts, the clogs, the wraparound sunglasses, the red hair pulled back into its ponytail. One moment, a rotund Clark Kent in his underpants; the next, "Molto Mario"—the clever, many-layered name of his cooking television program, which, in one of its senses, literally means Very Mario (that is, an intensified Mario, an exaggerated Mario)—and a figure whose renown I didn't appreciate until, as guests of the commissioner, we were allowed onto the field before the game. Fans of the New York Giants are so famously brutish as to be cartoons (bare-chested on a wintry morning or wearing hard hats; in any case, not guys putting in their domestic duty in the kitchen), and I was surprised by how many recognized the ponytailed chef, who stood facing them, arms crossed over his chest, beaming. "Hey, Molto!" they shouted. "What's cooking, Mario?" "Mario, make me a pasta!" At the time, Molto Mario was shown on afternoons on cable television, and I found a complex picture of the working metropolitan male emerging, one rushing home the moment his shift ended to catch lessons in braising his broccoli rabe and getting just the right forked texture on his homemade orecchiette. I stood back with one of the security people, taking in the spectacle (by now members of the crowd were chanting "Molto, Molto, Molto")—this very round man, whose manner and dress said, "Dude, where's the party?"

"I love this guy," the security man said. "Just lookin' at him makes me hungry."

Mario Batali is the most recognized chef in a city with more chefs than any other city in the world. In addition to Batali's television show—and his appearances promoting, say, the NASCAR race track in

Delaware—he was simply and energetically omnipresent. It would be safe to say that no New York chef ate more, drank more, and was out and about as much. If you live in New York City, you will see him eventually (sooner, if your evenings get going around two in the morning). With his partner, Joe, Batali also owned two other restaurants, Esca and Lupa, and a shop selling Italian wine, and, when we met, they were talking about opening a pizzeria and buying a vineyard in Tuscany. But Babbo was the heart of their enterprise, crushed into what was originally a nineteenth-century coach house, just off Washington Square, in Greenwich Village. The building was narrow; the space was crowded, jostly, and loud; and the food, studiously Italian, rather than Italian-American, was characterized by an over-the-top flourish that seemed to be expressly Batali's. People went there in the expectation of excess. Sometimes I wondered if Batali was less a conventional cook than an advocate of a murkier enterprise of stimulating outrageous appetites (whatever they might be) and satisfying them intensely (by whatever means). A friend of mine, who'd once dropped by the bar for a drink and was then fed personally by Batali for the next six hours, went on a diet of soft fruit and water for three days. "This guy knows no middle ground. It's just excess on a level I've never known before—it's food and drink, food and drink, food and drink, until you feel you're on drugs." Chefs who were regular visitors were subjected to extreme versions of what was already an extreme experience. "We're going to kill him," Batali said to me with maniacal glee as he prepared a meal for a rival who had innocently ordered a seven-course tasting menu, to which Batali added a lethal number of extra courses. The starters (all variations in pig) included lonza (the cured backstrap from the cream-apple-and-walnut herd), coppa (from the shoulder), a fried foot, a porcini mushroom roasted with Batali's own pancetta (the belly), plus ("for the hell of it") a pasta topped with guanciale (the jowls). This year, Mario was trying out a new motto: "Wretched excess is just barely enough."

Batali was born in 1960 and grew up outside Seattle: a suburban kid with a solid Leave It to Beaver upbringing. His mother, Marilyn, is En-glish and French Canadian—from her comes her son's flaming red hair and a fair, un-Italian complexion. The Italian is from his father, Armandino, the grandson of immigrants who arrived in the 1890s. When Mario was growing up, his father was a well-paid Boeing executive in charge of procuring airplane parts made overseas, and in 1975, after being posted to Europe, to supervise the manufacturing close-up, he moved his family to Spain. That, according to Gina, Mario's youngest sibling, was when Mario changed. ("He was already pushing the limits.") Madrid, in the post-Franco years (bars with no minimum age, hash hangouts, the world's oldest profession suddenly legalized), was a place of exhilarating license, and Mario seems to have experienced a little bit of everything on offer. He was caught growing marijuana on the roof of his father's apartment building (the first incident of what would become a theme—Batali was later expelled from his dorm in college, suspected of dealing, and, later still, there was some trouble in Tijuana that actually landed him in jail). The marijuana association also evokes a memory of the first meals Batali remembers preparing, late-night panini with caramelized locally grown onions, a local cow's-milk Spanish cheese, and paper-thin slices of chorizo: "The best stoner munch you can imagine; me and my younger brother Dana were just classic stoner kids—we were so happy."

By the time Batali returned to the United States in 1978 to attend Rutgers University, in New Jersey, he was determined to get back to Europe ("I wanted to be a Spanish banker—I loved the idea of making a lot of money and living a luxurious life in Madrid"), and his unlikely double major was in business management and Spanish theatre. But after being thrown out of his dorm, Batali got work as a dishwasher at a pizzeria called Stuff Yer Face (in its name alone, destiny was calling), and his life changed. He was promoted to cook, then line cook (working at one "station" in a "line" of stations, making one thing), and then asked to be manager, an offer he turned down. He didn't want the responsibility; he was having too good a time. The life

at Stuff Yer Face was fast (twenty-five years later, he still claims he has the record for the most pizzas made in an hour), sexy (“The most booooootiful waitresses in town”), and very buzzy (“I don’t want to come off as a big druggy, but when a guy comes into the kitchen with a pizza pan turned upside down, covered with lines of crack, how can you say no?”). When, in his junior year, he attended a career conference hosted by representatives from major corporations, Batali realized he had been wrong; he was never going to be a banker. He was going to be a chef.

“My mother and grandmother had always told me that I should be a cook. In fact, when I was preparing my applications for college, my mother had suggested cooking school. But I said, ‘Ma, that’s too gay. I don’t want to go to cooking school—that’s for fags.’ ” Five years later, Batali was back in Europe, attending the Cordon Bleu in London.

His father, still overseeing Boeing’s foreign operations, was now based in England. Gina Batali was there, too, and recalls seeing her eldest brother only when she was getting ready for school and he was returning from his all-night escapades after attending classes during the day and then working at a pub. The pub was the Six Bells, on the King’s Road in Chelsea. Mario had been bartending at the so-called American bar (“No idea what I was doing”), when a high-priced dining room opened in the back and a chef was hired to run it, a Yorkshire man named Marco Pierre White. Batali, bored by the pace of cooking school, was hired to be the new chef’s slave.

Today, Marco Pierre White is regarded as one of the most influential chefs in Britain (as well as the most foul-tempered, most mercurial, and most bullying), and it’s an extraordinary fortuity that these two men, both in their early twenties, found themselves in a tiny pub kitchen together. Batali didn’t understand what he was witnessing: his restaurant experience had been making strombolis in New Brunswick. “I assumed I was seeing what everyone else already knew. I didn’t feel like I was on the cusp of a revolution. And yet, while I had no idea this guy was about to become so famous, I could see he was preparing food from outside the box. He was a genius on the plate. I’d never worked on presentation. I just put shit on the plate.” He described White’s making a deep green puree from basil leaves and then a white butter sauce, then swirling the green sauce in one direction, and the white sauce in the other, and drawing a swerving line down the middle of the plate. “I had never seen anyone draw fucking lines with two sauces.” White would order Batali to follow him to market (“I was his whipping boy—’Yes, master,’ I’d answer, ‘whatever you say, master’ ”) and they’d return with game birds or ingredients for some of the most improbable dishes ever to be served in an English pub: écrevisses in a reduced lobster sauce, oysters with caviar, roasted ortolan (a rare, tiny bird served virtually breathing, gulped down, innards and all, like a raw crustacean)—“the whole menu written out in fucking French.”

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