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FOOD & DRINK

Michael White, The Prince of Pasta

What a master of Italian cuisine gets up to at home

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Since earning rave reviews a decade ago at Manhattan's Fiamma Osteria, Wisconsin-raised, Italian-trained chef Michael White has built a small empire, creating a string of highly regarded restaurants in New York (Marea, Osteria



Chef Michael White with his wife at home KATHRYN HURNI FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Morini, Ai Fiori) and New Jersey (Due Terre, Due Mari). Mr. White expanded his empire with the opening of his first foreign venture, Al Molo, in Hong Kong, last month. He spoke with Off Duty about cooking with his 8-year-old daughter, nifty kitchen gadgets and the trouble with unworthy balsamics.



Olive oil GETTY IMAGES

When people come over, everyone wants pasta, so that's what I do. It works out to the one pot meal thing, and that's what chefs really want to make at home.

One ingredient I won't skimp on is finishing oil, usually Tuscan and Umbrian olive oil. Right now at home, I'm using new harvest olive oil from Molise.

In my kitchen, I need to have Colatura di Alici, which is anchovy juice that comes from Cetara. I

hate to use this word, but it's one of these 'umami' foods. It has an all-encompassing flavor profile, amazing in soups or tomato sauce.

I can do without all the different types of balsamic vinegars. There's only one real balsamic, and that takes years to age. A sample is taken to the town of Spilamberto, where the consortium is, and they test it and you can only make so many bottles. The huge commercial market in America is all about packaging, and it's caramel color and red wine vinegar and they mix it together with sugar. I also can't stand drizzling with balsamic, it's totally annoying.

For Sunday meals with friends, we'll have lasagna. The tradition in Bologna, and at our house, is to have lasagna verde. My wife makes it on Saturday and we'll have friends over and eat it on Sunday.

My kitchen is very open. It's 10 by 10 feet, with a Viking stove and a Subzero fridge and pull-out drawers. It's a good size, with a glass table so we can sit around and talk.



Colatura di Alici MARKETHALLFOODS

There's not a day that doesn't pass that I don't have a couple of Diet Pepsis. That's usually my nightcap. I know it sounds crazy, but when I come home from working and everyone's sleeping, there's nothing like a little Diet Pepsi and the 11 o'clock news.

I don't use a pasta maker at home, because we do everything freehand. My wife is from Molise so we'll make cavatelli, roll it out and cut it. Or we'll make a sauce with beef chunks, take the meat out, eat the pasta first and then the meat as the entrée. We take a nap after.

My go-to drink is Campari and soda. Americans don't like bitter, but I think if they gave bitter a chance, they'd see how effervescent water and something bitter is very palate-cleansing and gets you ready to eat. At home we'll make Campari or Aperol, soda and Prosecco. That's about as frou-frou as I'll get.



Mr. White's Viking stove KATHRYN HURNI FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

My indispensable gadget is my gold-plated truffle slicer from Urbani Truffles in Umbria. Remember the SaladShooter infomercials? My truffle slicer is my SaladShooter. I use it for carrots, radishes, cucumbers, Parmigiano shavings.

When I'm cooking with my daughter, we love to make chow fun noodles. We'll go to Chinatown on Saturday and we'll get the noodles and bok choy and make them for dinner.

I always knew I wanted to be a chef. My dad, a banker, would make bread, and make soup. He was an avid home cook and that's how it really started.

If I couldn't cook anymore, I'd definitely do something with racing. When I moved to Italy and got to watch the Ferrari team testing starts in Imola, it was unbelievable. I'd go right to the track.

A contraband ingredient in the United States that I wish were legal is mantis shrimp. Hong Kong has them, so we're going to make the best spaghetti allo scoglio there.

One of my secrets to running a calm kitchen is that I speak softly. If people want to hear me, everyone has to be calm and quiet.



A nightcap of Diet Pepsi PEPSICO

—Edited from an interview by Jackie Cooperman



Mr. White's gold-plated truffle slicer KATHRYN HURNI FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



The chef's daughter Francesca, 8, in the kitchen KATHRYN HURNI FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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