

Behind the scenes with five
of St. Louis' culinary greats

story by MATT SORRELL

LIFE in the Restaurant BIZ

photos by WESLEY LAW

GERARD CRAFT

Chef/Owner
CRAFT RESTAURANT GROUP

WITH MULTIPLE JAMES BEARD AWARD nominations and countless other culinary accolades to his credit, Gerard Craft has come a long way from his days as a punk kid in DC, tagging unsuspecting buildings and billboards and generally being a nuisance to society. Craft is not only a talented chef known for his culinary creativity and risk-taking, but he is also a successful restaurateur whose dining concepts have led the way to new ways of thinking on the local foodie scene. Needless to say, his days are anything but typical.

The number of **Perriers Craft quaffs**
over the course of the day **2**

The number of **restaurants** in the
Craft Restaurant Group **4**

The number of Craft's
employees with the opening
of his latest project, Pastaria. **150**

Number of
texts per day **100+**

"IT'S MY PUREST EXPRESSION."

- On his flagship restaurant, **Niche**



Playing in the
Niche kitchen
during prep:
'90s rap—
**House of
Pain** and
Ice Cube.



9am Start time.

Morning Ritual Sump Coffee in South City for his initial AM jolt of java. The coffee is mighty fine, and the low-key, Zen-like atmosphere has a calming effect.

11am Check-In. Craft arrives at the construction site for the new **side-by-side Pastaria** and **Niche locations** in downtown Clayton and trades his ball cap for a hardhat and reflective vest.

Meeting No. 1 At the new Niche with local artist Peat Wollaeger about a possible mural. The idea is to keep it edgy enough to shake things up without overwhelming the space.

1pm Back at the Ranch. Craft checks in with his cooks on the progress of the evening prep at Niche, while tasting and joking. Despite the **tattoos** and two-day stubble, he comes across as anything but a tough guy.

Meeting No. 2 In the private dining area at Niche, Craft and his assistant, Brittany Zehr, go over the travel itinerary for his upcoming **family vacation**. Then, on to the main issues of the day—moving and storing some church pews for Pastaria, material for upcoming blog posts and the pros and cons of buying a new gelato machine.

Meeting No. 3 Team **brainstorming** session about a new tasting menu for Niche with Zehr, business partner Adam Altnether, Niche chef de cuisine Nate Hereford and Niche GM Chris Kelling.

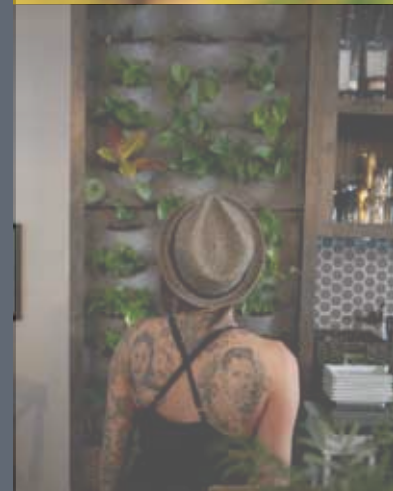
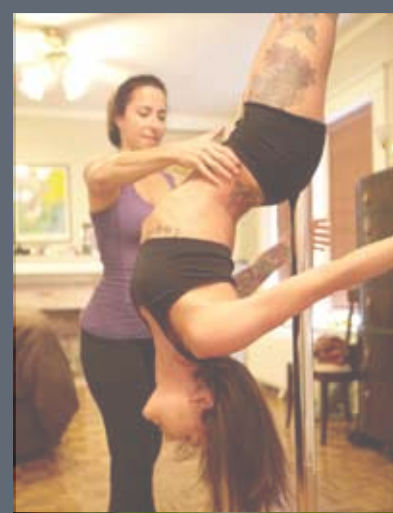
4pm Transition to chef whites.

5pm Start of dinner service. Craft oversees the **kitchen** as the dining room fills up, giving the dishes a final look before they head out to the table.

11pm Quitting time.

"JUST BECAUSE I'M MOVING TO CLAYTON DOESN'T MEAN MY FOOD IS SUDDENLY GOING TO SUCK."
- On the furor surrounding the relocation of Niche to the county.





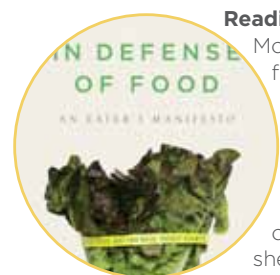
JAYNE PELLEGRINO HAS ATTAINED A REPUTATION as one of the area's top mixologists, working behind the stick at Pi Pizzeria, then moving to members-only eatery Blood & Sand Downtown. Despite her love of fine cocktails, though, Pellegrino has a multitude of other interests that more than fill up her plate.



Mode of Transport: **Black Mini Cooper.** On nice days, she might break out her bike, a Honda Shadow 750. "I like things that go," she says. Someday, when time and money permit, she wants to get her pilot's license.



"I LIKE TO BRING THE BACK OF THE HOUSE TO THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE...I LOVE BEING IN THE KITCHEN."



Reading List: Mostly non-fiction, everything from culinary and cocktail tomes to psychology. Currently, she's on a Michael Pollan kick.

"IF I COULD BE ANYONE, IT'D BE ANTHONY BOURDAIN. I WANT HIS JOB! TRAVEL, EAT AND GET PAID FOR IT? YES, PLEASE!"

11am Workout. Pellegrino was a competitive figure skater growing up, and she also studied dance, so keeping fit is in her blood. Now, her main workout of choice is **pole class**, which keeps her flexible and builds strength, making it easier to get through those long shifts on her feet behind the bar. Plus, she relishes a challenge. "It's so hard; I had to do it," she says.

12:30pm Wardrobe Change. Pellegrino heads home for a shower, a costume change and a quick protein shake before heading back out.

Green Thumb One of Pellegrino's work duties is keeping the **grow walls** at Blood & Sand green, as well as putting together the flower arrangements for the dining room. She stops by florist Baisch & Skinner to pick up some new plants before work. Most of what's growing behind the bar now is non-edible greenery—ivy, watermelon begonias and angel hair. Once some logistics are worked out, herbs for cocktail use will join them.

2pm Pit Stop. Pellegrino spends time over coffee and a good book at The Mud House before heading in to work. "I'm a total book worm; I love to learn."

Partners in Crime Pellegrino shares bartending duties at Blood & Sand with fellow mixologist **Lucas Ramsey**, and likes to keep up on what chef **Chris Bork** is working with that might make for an interesting new libation add. They've experimented with everything from bacon popcorn simple syrup to pear juice "caviar" pearls.

3pm The Prep. On days when she doesn't have barback support, which is more often than not, Pellegrino preps garnishes and juices, and fills the ice bins before her shift. "A lot of people think because we open at 5pm that I come in five minutes before that and just start making drinks," she says.

Behind The Bar On solo nights, Pellegrino handles the needs of the patrons at the bar, as well as orders from the dining room. Her favorite guests are those who challenge her to **go off-menu** and make something custom for them.

Last Call Water plants, check. Turn on grow light, check.

1am Quitting Time.



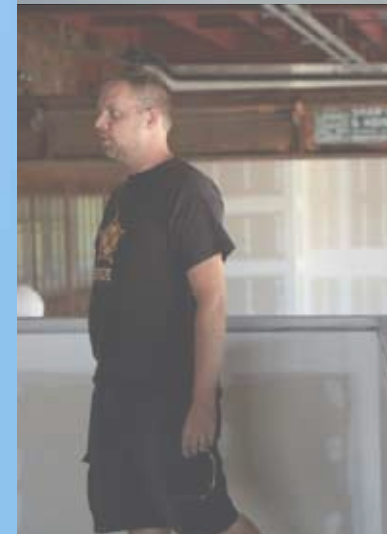
JAYNE PELLEGRINO

Mixologist
BLOOD & SAND



BRIAN HARDESTY

Chef/Owner
GUERRILLA STREET FOOD



BRIAN HARDESTY MADE A NAME FOR HIMSELF in the Lou as executive chef of the late Terrene in the CWE. He left the kitchen there not to sign on at another restaurant, but to truly do his own thing. In July 2011, he jumped into the food truck fray, putting Guerrilla Street Food on the road with partner Joel Crespo. Offering a unique take on Filipino fare, the truck has become one of the most popular rolling eateries around—but it's only one of many projects that occupies Hardesty's days as of late.

The number of cups of **coffee and accompanying cigarettes** Hardesty consumes while planning the day's business.

2



Twitter followers
@guerrillastreet

4,000

Guerrilla Street Food
Facebook fans

2,000

Social Media posts
per day

15



Mode of Transport: A bright red 2012 **Subaru Impreza WRX** is his main ride when not manning the GSF truck. It's also his first new car.

8am Wake-up call

Score! Hardesty gets an e-mail that the new batch of Guerrilla Street Food t-shirts are in—just in time for the upcoming Food Truck Friday event at Tower Grove Park.

9:30am Taste Test. Hardesty samples some watermelon gazpacho and black pepper aioli whipped up by one of his cooks. The verdict: Both dishes make the cut for today's menu, though the aioli needed some tweaking to tone down the heat.

10am Game Plan. After the truck is loaded, Hardesty goes over the day's itinerary with his crew. Today, they'll be setting up at an office park in **Earth City**, a guaranteed location, so there's no need to plan for a possible fallback spot if things don't pan out.

Truck Time For the first six months or so, Hardesty manned the truck almost daily. Some recent hires have freed him up to concentrate on other projects, but he still makes it out on the road. Hardesty talks about having multiple trucks in the future, maybe focusing on different cuisines, and possibly opening a brick-and-mortar location for GSF at some point.

Road Trip The partners discuss the details of their upcoming **research trip to Los Angeles**. The plan is to hit white-tablecloth places as well as street food vendors to get a feel for what's happening on the West Coast and glean some ideas to bring back home.

Noon New Gig. Hardesty recently inked a deal to become **executive chef at Element**, an upscale eatery scheduled to bow early next year in the Power Plant Building near Lafayette Square. He heads to the Element space for a look around, and makes notes about what still needs to be addressed before construction begins. At the top of the agenda: acoustics.

5pm Menu planning, answering FB messages, hashing out possible concepts for the next incarnation of GSF.

9pm Quitting time.

"WHEN WE STARTED THE TRUCK, IT WASN'T BECAUSE THERE WEREN'T ANY OTHER FILIPINO FOOD PLACES AROUND. WE DID IT BECAUSE IT'S GOOD FOOD."

SAM HILMER AND JOANNA DULEY have a lot on their collective plates. In addition to running an organic farm, making wine and raising livestock, the pair also hosts uber-popular communal dinners at Claverach's renovated barn—featuring the farm's bounty and often a guest chef or two. "It's pretty fluid around here," says Duley. "Each day is different."



Number of acres on the farm reserved for growing **vegetables**.

5

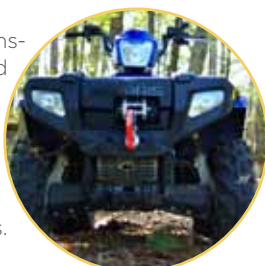
Number of acres that are planted with **grapes**. In addition to the various crops, Hilmer and Duley raise chickens, heritage breed turkeys and keep five sheep roaming around for grass-mowing purposes.

7

The **age of the barn's** main structure. However, the building proper has been completely revamped to include heated floors, a commercial kitchen and walls paneled with cedar planks milled from trees on the property.

100

Mode of Transport: Around the farm, a pair of battered four-wheeled **ATVs** are the main rides.



6:30am Wake-up call

Lay of The Land Followed by a couple of their **farm dogs**, Snickle and Pixie, Duley and Hilmer take a walk to inspect the lower fields, where they grow everything from squash to tomatoes to buckwheat. The rest of the pack, Violet and Gypsy, hang out back at the barn.

Time Out The inspection is halted while Hilmer attempts to keep Snickle from "fertilizing" a row of vegetables.

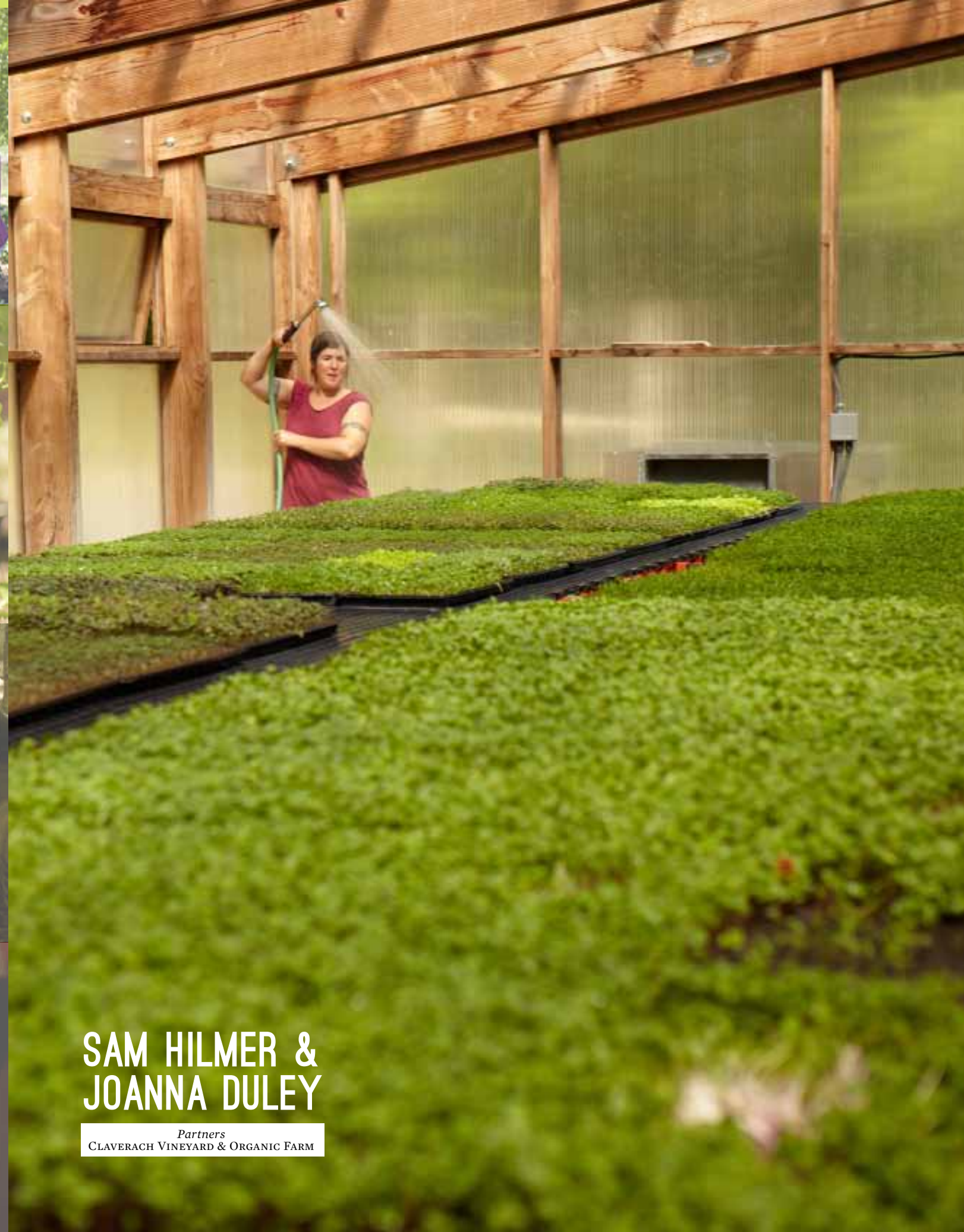
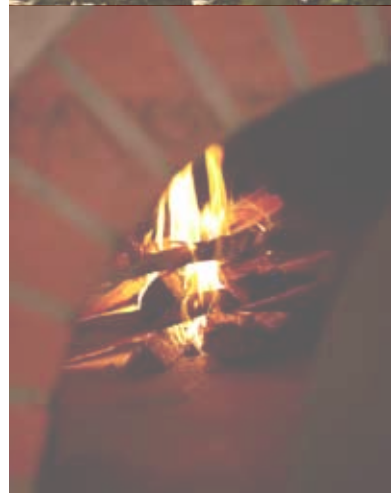
10am Trial And Error. A lot of what they do on the farm is experimentation. "Sometimes you just don't know," Hilmer says. "So, we try things out and see what works." The duo takes a ride uphill to the top of the property where the main vineyards are to **inspect some grape vines** they recently grafted onto new roots.

Walking The Line The grape arbors are covered with netting to keep the birds and other critters at bay. Hilmer walks through the rows replacing sections that have blown off during a recent storm. The grapes are used to make **Claverach wine**, which they also make on the farm, and much of the other produce ends up on guests' plates at their barn dinners.

Noon Harvest Time. Duley harvests some radish and sunflower shoots, one of the farm's biggest cash crops, which make their way to local farmers' markets, as well as onto local restaurant menus. The shoots are raised in trays in a greenhouse, so getting them ready for market isn't quite as labor-intensive as bringing in the other crops.

Fire It Up Duley checks the wood-burning oven—the centerpiece of the barn's communal dining room. She worked in restaurants before heading to the country and says they'll be focusing more on culinary events like their **Sunday Suppers** in the future.

5pm Quitting time, unless there's a dinner or other special event.



**SAM HILMER &
JOANNA DULEY**

Partners
CLAVERACH VINEYARD & ORGANIC FARM

"WE SHARE A VISION." -JOANNA
"YOU HAVE TO STAY EXCITED." -SAM



PETER WHITLEY

Pastry Sous Chef
THE FOUR SEASONS HOTEL ST. LOUIS

CHEF PETER WHITLEY HAS A LOT ON HIS PLATE, so to speak. As the pastry sous chef for The Four Seasons, he's responsible for the sweets, breads and assorted baked goods served at Cielo, the hotel restaurant, as well as for all banquet events, room service orders and the hotel's new donut shop, Bomboloni. Trying to please such a diverse audience of eaters means no two days are quite the same.

Size of the **pastry shop** **6'x9'**
Size of the **pastry chef** **6'2"**
Total number of **pastry shop employees.** **5**

The cramped quarters become even more apparent when Whitley has to crowd around the PC during a noon appointment with a prospective bride and groom to review **wedding cake designs**.

"YOU DEFINITELY HAVE TO BE FLEXIBLE AROUND HERE."

Special Guest Requests: Always. Whitley and his crew once made a full-sized replica of a brown wing-tip shoe out of modeling chocolate and cocoa powder for a regular guest.



Mode of Transport: **2000 Buick LeSabre.** "Not very glamorous, but it gets the job done."

"EVERYTHING'S BETTER WITH A LITTLE SUGAR ON IT."

11am Start time.

11:30am Morning Rush. The bakers are finishing up their overnight shift while Whitley and the rest of his crew are busy prepping for the rest of the day. Despite four people dancing around assorted kitchen equipment in a space the size of a master bedroom, the vibe is calm and efficient—almost tranquil.

Tastes of The Day Chocolate chip muffins, donuts and buttercream icing for a wedding cake.

Crowd Pleaser Whitley's new **bacon maple donut** gets the win for fan favorite from staff and visitors.

The Day's Project Building a **multi-tiered wedding cake** for a reception that night. Whitley places each successive layer of the cake on a pedestal, then turns it—like throwing pottery—as he spreads the buttercream icing with a flat knife. Periodically, he stops to check the height of the piece with a ruler. "It's a lot like spackling a wall."

12:30pm Timeout. Whitley takes a break to run some menu ideas by executive chef Fabrizio Schenardi.

Stream of Visitors: Constant. From the food and beverage director to line cooks, waitresses and assorted hotel staff, somebody is always popping in to see what confections are being created—and usually angling to get a sample or two.

2pm The Lull: early afternoon, after the breakfast rush but before the ramp-up to dinner. The bakers have gone home, and Whitley has the pastry kitchen to himself. He goes to the lobby to check on the new Bombolini.

10pm Dinner Service. Dinner is a two-person effort by Whitley and one of his staff. He tends mostly to expedite orders, but he'll lend a hand when things get harried. "We've designed the menu to be handled by a couple of us."

11pm Quitting time.

