

# edible

SACRAMENTO™ WINTER 2010

IN THIS ISSUE:

THE WICKY WACKY WOO:  
A DAVIS BIRTHRIGHT  
DISCERNING TERROIR  
**PLUS:** THE CHEF'S TABLE



**CUPPING,  
DON'T CALL  
IT A COMEBACK**

# Piatti Chef Ryan O'Malley

**R**yan O'Malley graduated with a degree in film and video studies from the University of Michigan. So how did this self-taught cook become Piatti's executive chef?

Starting at the age of sixteen, O'Malley worked various restaurant jobs from washing dishes to waiting tables. Then, after college, he landed a job as a cook in a tiny Mexican restaurant in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

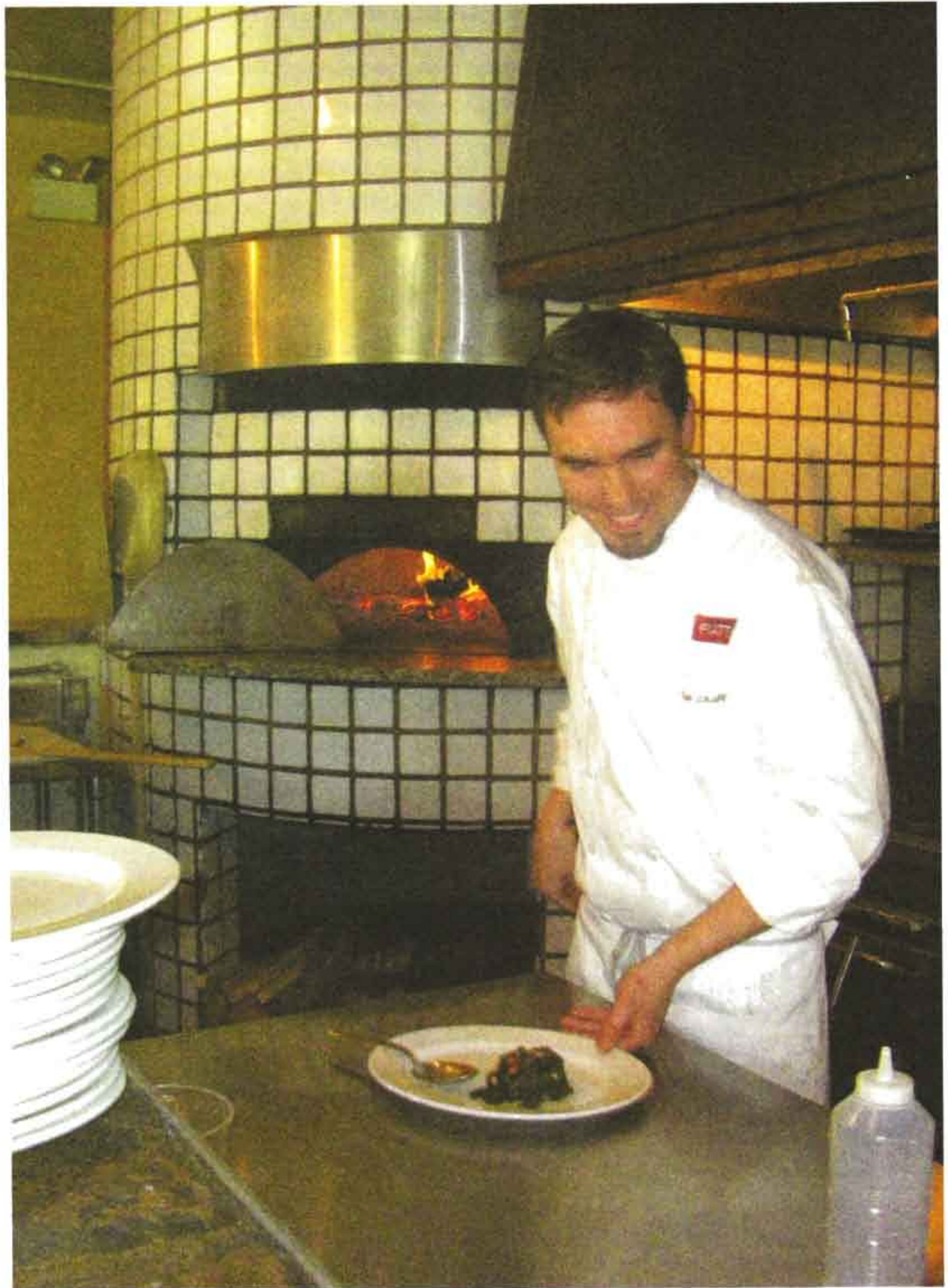
"The owner of the restaurant was open to my suggestions, and without any formal training, I started experimenting there," O'Malley said. "I fell in love with cooking for cooking."

O'Malley moved to Los Angeles to put his film and video studies degree to work and spent four years as a freelance crew worker. He told himself that if he ever switched careers, he would become a chef.

"As a parent, you want the world to be a better place for your kid," O'Malley said. "With a love of cooking and a love of food, that was a way I saw I could make a difference in my son's and family's life and now in other people's lives."

Through various twists and turns, O'Malley ended up in the Sacramento area and landed a position at La Provence in Roseville. Within six months, he worked his way up to lead cook at dinner.

Following his stint at La Provence, O'Malley went to



Spataro, where he was introduced to Italian cooking.

O'Malley then served as the sous chef at Hawks in

Granite Bay and helped open the Grange restaurant at the Citizen Hotel in downtown Sacramento before landing

at Piatti's at Pavilion in April 2009.

"The hallmark of what I do is simplicity," O'Malley said.

“The thing with simplicity is the simpler it is, the more you have to nail it.”

O'Malley believes in treating ingredients minimally, using their essence and letting the quality shine through. But don't confuse “simple” with “boring.” The ingredients of Italian fare may not have a lot of complexity to them, but

**“Every day, when I walk through the kitchen doors, I want to find a way to make the food better than I did the day before. I think it's that passion that truly fuels a good cook.”**

---

combining them and refining the dishes requires a lot of technique.

“If there's not a lot of stuff to hide behind, then everything has to be right on point,” O'Malley said. “And that's one of the beautiful things about Italian food—that it's focused on the ingredients.”

O'Malley designs Piatti's dishes around the seasons, and he makes a point of buying as local as possible. “When I

took over, one dish that was almost always sold was the Scottish farmed salmon,” said O'Malley. “I wanted to get away from that. Even if the fish was sustainably raised, flying it in from Scotland everyday isn't very sustainable. I look for items closer to home.”

In accordance with traditional Italian cooking, O'Malley knows the locavore concept goes beyond the latest trend. Europeans, he points out, have been eating that way for centuries and the same way of thinking has only recently become a hallmark of American cooking.

O'Malley appreciates that Europeans eat what's in the market, in town, that day. There are no supermarkets per se—no one-stop shops. “They seem to have a closer connection with the earth, the farmer, what's there and readily available,” he said. “I think that's the way people should eat. It makes sense.”

O'Malley knew when he became the executive chef that it would be hard to walk into a restaurant with a lot of regulars and change things. His goal is for patrons—both regulars and new alike—to not only expect quality, well prepared, flavorful food, but also to have the confidence to order something new and find that the dish exceeds their expectations.

“Every day, when I walk through the kitchen doors, I want to find a way to make the food better than I did the day before,” said O'Malley. “I think it's that passion that truly fuels a good cook.”

—Elizabeth Kalfsbeek