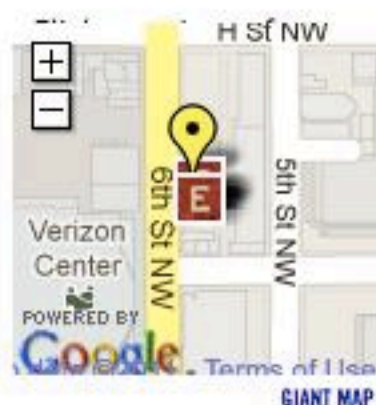


Mike Isabella on Realizing Chefs Don't Care How You Look

Wednesday, September 7, 2011, by Eater Staff

Welcome back to *Ink Spotted*, a new feature in which Eater talks to DC's tattooed chefs and gets the stories behind their most intriguing ink.



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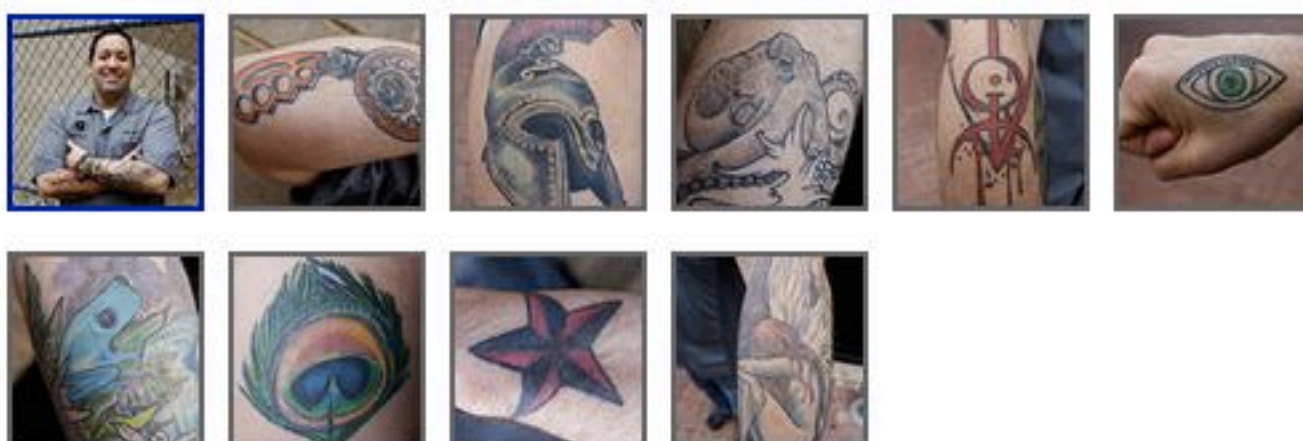
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[Nevin Martell/Eater.com]

A decade ago, Graffiato's **Mike Isabella** walked into the now-defunct Nicole's on the Upper West Side of New York City looking for a job. He was surprised to find that the eatery's chef sported blue hair and a body crisscrossed with tattoos. "I thought it was the coolest thing," says Isabella, who scored the gig that day. **"It made me realize that chefs don't care what you look like. They only care if you have a clean outfit and sharp knives."** Strangely enough, the tattoo-loving cook that hired Isabella was none other **Ed Witt**, who now works as the executive chef at 701.

The *Top Chef* contestant now sports more than a dozen tattoos himself, many inspired by important junctions in his life. Last December, he was wracking his brain for a tattoo to commemorate the upcoming opening of his Penn Quarter hotspot. "I wanted something tough and cool," he says. "So I got a **badass pizza cutter with brass knuckles.**"

He's in the midst of a sea scene that will consume the space from his knee to his ankle on his right leg. Right now there's only an uncolored octopus, but he plans on filling in the rest of the space with a variety of **edible marine life and some prehistoric undersea monsters.** "I'm not looking forward to it," he admits. "It's going to take a long time and it's going to hurt."

—Nevin Martell