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Better Living

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COVER STORY



BETH BALBIERZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Rocca chef-owner Craig Levy's two-fisted indulgence: a slice from John's Boy Pizza and a Dunkin' Donuts French vanilla iced coffee.

Chefs' answers to the munchies

By **BILL PITCHER**
STAFF WRITER

Alert the health inspectors. There's a dirty little secret in North Jersey's finest restaurant kitchens. Some of your favorite chefs are hiding some filthy eating habits under those toques.

"People think chefs eat all these great meals ... but for the most part, we eat like anyone else," said Peter Loria, chef-owner of Café Matisse in Rutherford, who has developed a Baskin-Robbins pralines-and-cream habit.

"You're tired of looking at your own stuff all day," said Peter Angelakos of

Bacari Grill in Washington Township. "It's better to eat that Big Mac in front of my TV in my pajamas than have something from my own kitchen."

That's right. When Angelakos finishes plating up veal shanks and duck, he's on his way to the drive-thru lane. "I'm a fast-food junkie," he said. "And everyone here knows it."

And they're not alone in their guilty pleasures. When he's not cooking whole fish at Varka in Ramsey, George Georgiades admits occasionally eating chocolate chip cookies with Ben & Jerry's New York Super Fudge Chunk ice cream, straight from the carton.

Craig Levy of Rocca in Glen Rock crosses the street and heads 150 paces to the left for Dunkin' Donuts' French vanilla iced coffee or heads 50 paces to the right for a few slices from John's Boy Pizza. "Yesterday, it was

■ **What's your guilty pleasure?** Visit Second Helpings, our Food blog, and post it under the Comments. northjersey.com/foodblog.

lunch and dinner," he said.

Even Anthony Lo Pinto, most recently of Earth in Totowa (and chef at Crave in Fairfield when it opens in September), admits being "a junk-food junkie." And he's a biodynamic farmer! "It's White Castle for me," he said. "When I get the craving, I go get a couple of those nasty burgers. It's one of the worst things you could ever think of. The following morning, my stomach's in a knot."

Frank Gencarelli of Francesco's in Paterson, sneaks out in the

afternoon for a slice from his brother's pizza joint, Pizza City, and at night, indulges in a cheesesteak with raw onions from Libby's. "I think customers would probably be surprised if they knew," he said.

Are there exceptions? Sure, but they're rare. Michael Latour of Latour Restaurant in Ridgewood said he tries to eat well, grilling at home on his days off or sampling the cuisine at other restaurants around town, because he rarely has time to sit and enjoy a meal on workdays. "I don't do any ice cream binges or cookies in the middle of the night," he said.

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How chefs indulge

■ **Chris D'Eletto, Jack's Café, Westwood:** Lay's stackable potato chips — either the original or the salt-and-vinegar flavor. "I always have them right beside my bed. My kids laugh at me."

■ **Hans Egg, Saddle River Inn, Saddle River:** A familiar treat in an unexpected place. "I enjoy trips to Ikea where I indulge with a couple of their sizzling hot dogs. The price is also right, just 50 cents each."

■ **Alex Gorant, Axia Taverna, Tenafly:** Almost too many to name, starting with White Manna burgers from Hackensack, but continuing with Italian comfort food. "There are times when I have pregnancy-like cravings for a good chicken Parmesan sandwich and must stop what I'm doing and eat one."

■ **Michael Haimowitz, Arthur's Landing, Weehawken:** Fig Newtons. "They remind me of a cookie that my aunt used to make when I was a kid. Instant comfort and a little sugar buzz to boot."

■ **John Halligan, The Park Steak House, Park Ridge:** Bachman's pretzels, although Halligan also will admit eating beef that's decidedly not prime like his steakhouse's.

"Let's put it this way: I have a White Castle coffee mug on my desk."

■ **Kevin Kohler, Café Panache, Ramsey:** Sushi and beer, in mind-blowing quantities. "I'll sit alone, suck down a huge beer and just order a ton of sushi — enough for four people — and just inhale it."

■ **Joe Leggio, Leggio's Restaurant, Hawthorne:** Wine, cheese and soppressata. "I'm not a junk-food freak. I like to eat gourmet stuff — high-end stuff like high-end cheeses from France ... soppressata imported from Italy."

■ **Purvash Patel, Mantra, Paramus:** Fried stuff. "Mostly fried clams. I love it when it comes to junk food," he said. "But I usually hit Wendy's on a late night."

■ **Marko Radisic, Flirt Sushi Lounge, Allendale:** Homemade rolls with unusual combinations. The most recent one, he said, was a roll with tuna, sun-dried tomato, mozzarella, cucumber and eel. "Pretty good for 2 a.m."



HANS EGG



KEVIN KOHLER



JOE LEGGIO

ON THE COVER: Varka chef George Georgiades digs into a pint of his favorite ice cream. Staff photo by Peter Monsees.

CHEFS' SECRET