

Steve Schimoler

CHEF AND OWNER OF CROP BISTRO & BAR, 52

The basement of Crop Bistro & Bar smells amazing — there's a scent of bacon in the air, trays of artfully plated food line the counters. Chef Steve Schimoler peeks into a pot as he talks to a sous chef about a sauce his team is preparing for a private event later tonight. Instead of sneaking a taste of tonight's menu, Schimoler sees a stack of pizza boxes in a corner and loads a few slices on a plate. "Once a week we get so busy that we treat everyone to pizza, and they love it, including me," he says.

Since the October reopening of Crop, Schimoler has been going nonstop. The move from the Warehouse District to Ohio City's United Bank Building has allowed him to have a larger restaurant and kitchen upstairs plus room downstairs for a research facility, test kitchen and a private dining room (inside a bank vault, no less).

It's a decision that's been in the works for years. Schimoler first toured the space with developer Ari Maron in 2007, just six months after signing the lease on Crop's former location. "I'm a sucker for historic buildings," he says. "I knew in my heart I was going to end up here."

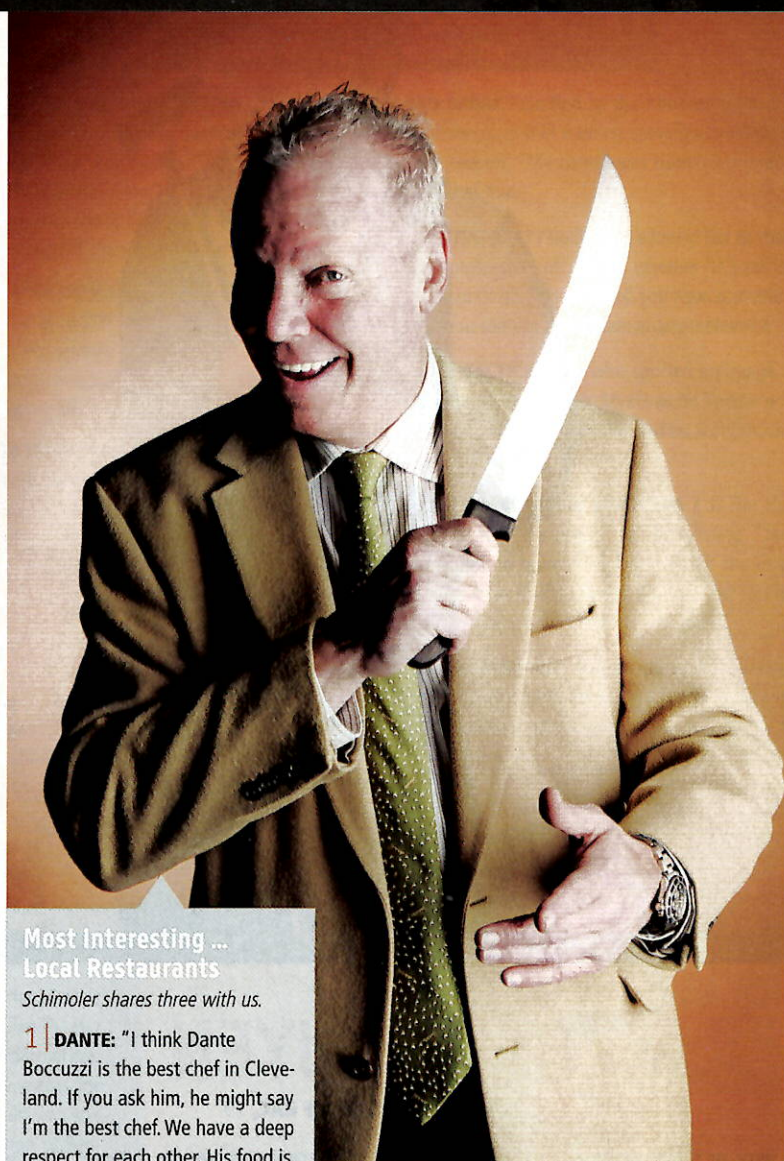
The Long Island, N.Y., native first found his way into the kitchen as a 10-year-old after seeing chef Graham Kerr's *The Galloping Gourmet* on TV. "If I liked what I saw, I would write down the recipe, and my mother would run down to the store to get the ingredients, and I would make it," he says. He still has the handwritten index card of his first recipe, a Charlotte Russe. "It turned out unbelievably great," he says. "It was phenomenal."

At 23, Schimoler launched his first restaurant, Terrace on the Plaza, without any professional culinary training. "I was good at what I did and had intuition of flavor and a visual eye for presentation, texture and color," he says. Terrace on the Plaza opened in 1982 on the north shore of Long Island. It was an instant success, attracting celebrities such as Brooke Shields, Sting and Barbra Streisand.

He eventually started catering, expanding to the point where he had 200 employees. At the time, he was only 26 and doing \$3 million a year in sales. "I was hooked," he says. "It taught me that you won't discover anything unless you are willing to explore."

He's continued to do that throughout his career. Schimoler opened other restaurants and businesses, and eventually began doing research and development for Cabot Cheese, Sysco and Nestlé, which brought him to Northeast Ohio in 2005.

Those experiences led him to open Crop, short for Customized Restaurant Operation Platform. It's a way for Schimoler to incor-



Most Interesting ... Local Restaurants

Schimoler shares three with us.

1 | DANTE: "I think Dante Boccuzzi is the best chef in Cleveland. If you ask him, he might say I'm the best chef. We have a deep respect for each other. His food is excellent. I love his style of Italian and Asian influences. They come together on the menu very well."

2 | OSTERIA: "It's an iconic example of that little restaurant that provides all the things that are valuable to a customer. The Bolognese pasta is my favorite dish."

3 | MOMOCHO: "I really respect Eric Williams' diligence and commitment. I like that he's not just doing tacos and enchiladas. He's doing the right things with the style of cuisine that makes it unique to his restaurant. He's consistent."

porate all his interests from running a restaurant to product development. The R&D side is something he's excited about at Crop's new space. A Kinetic water filtration system allows him to experiment with a variety of dishes, even something as simple as pizza dough.

"Our first project is to replicate New York City water to make pizza and bagel dough," he says. "New York City water is legendary. If you take a recipe from New York and try to make it in Phoenix, Ariz., it doesn't work as well because the water is so different."

It's that combination of science, exploration and love of food that drives Schimoler, who is also opening Crop Bistro & Brewery in Stowe, Vt., this month.

"There's a spirituality about food," he says.

"When you think about celebration, it really evolves around the food experience and the kitchen table. To me, whether you are in a restaurant or in your grandmother's house, the kitchen table is where people end up being the closest. It really inspired me to embrace that responsibility." // KS