

# Food



TRU LOVE | PAGE 3

**Power of 10**

For Tru chefs Rick Tramonto and Gale Gand, the past decade has been about being true to themselves. On Sunday, the pair marks the occasion with a star-studded dinner featuring 10 courses and 10 chefs.

ON THE WEB

Help yourself to our food blog Digging In, for tasty morsels about Chicago's food scene: [blogs.suntimes.com/food](http://blogs.suntimes.com/food).



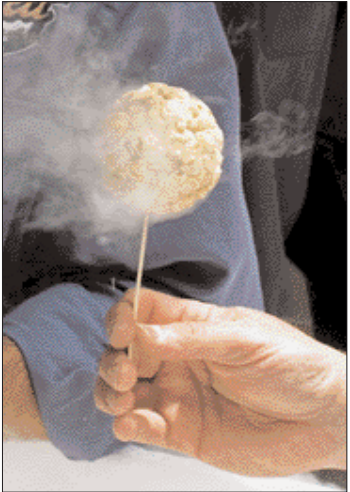
At the Chef's Table

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2009 | EDITOR: JANET RAUSA FULLER | S

Let's get into it.®

FOOD FEST



Stay cool at the Taste of Chicago with the popcornsicle, a flash-frozen popcorn ball.

## New take on popcorn: iced on stick

BY JANET RAUSA FULLER

Food Editor/jfuller@suntimes.com

Go figure. One of the more talked about items to be had at this year's Taste of Chicago is on a stick.

The popcornsicle — a popcorn ball put on a stick and flash-frozen in liquid nitrogen — will be among the offerings at the Garrett Popcorn booth.

The popcornsicle is the result of collaboration between the company and "Top Chef Season 5" runner-up Richard Blais for a promotional gig for the Garrett location in New York.

"Top Chef" fans will recall Blais as the faux-hawked chef with a penchant for liquid nitrogen — which also happens to be the key ingredient in the popcornsicle, along with Garrett's signature cheese and caramel corn mix.

Vendors will be dipping the popcornsicles to order in vats of liquid nitrogen (and no, Blais won't be on hand to help).

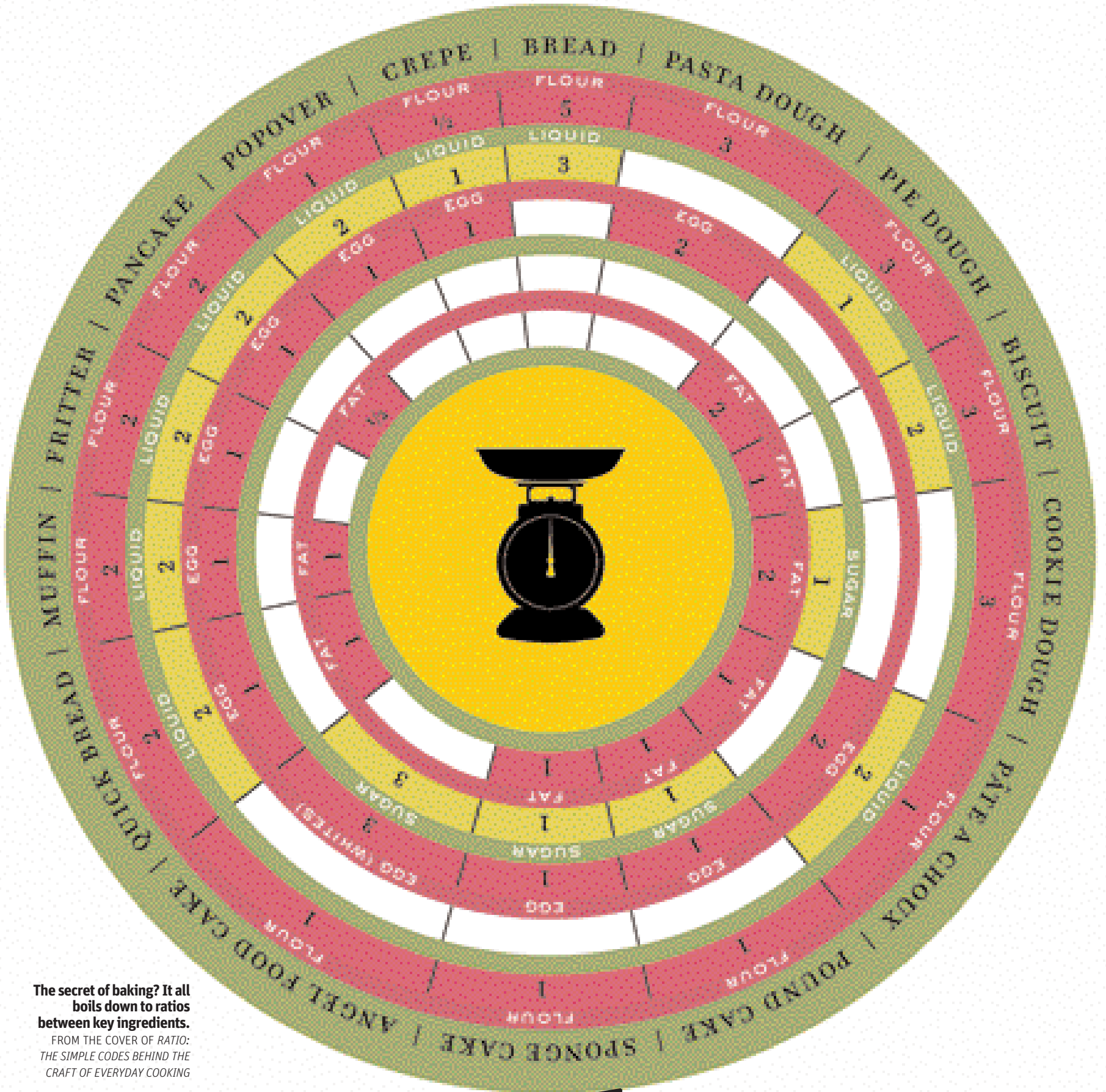
This is the first time Garrett Popcorn has participated in the Taste. There are two other new vendors this year: the old-school deli Manny's, 1141 S. Jefferson, and Blue Bayou, 3734 N. Southport.

Jack Aiello, Garrett's vice president of marketing, says the company wanted to mark its Taste debut in a big way, with a product perfect for hot weather.

The popcornsicle "creates a subzero feeling in the mouth," Aiello says.

The popcornsicles — which will cost six tickets each, or about \$4 — should stay cold for a few minutes, Aiello says.

The Taste of Chicago opens Friday and runs through July 5.



The secret of baking? It all boils down to ratios between key ingredients.

FROM THE COVER OF *RATIO: THE SIMPLE CODES BEHIND THE CRAFT OF EVERYDAY COOKING*

# Cracking the code

## 4:1 | Learn ingredient ratios and a baker you can be

BY MICHAEL NAGRANT

If man truly had to live on bread alone, especially bread he'd baked himself, I'd starve to death.

Like many cooks, I pride myself on improvisational skills. I revel in transforming an aimless romp through the farmers market into a grand feast. I live in the moments between stoking a bland chili and rescuing an insipid soup.

The lore of baking, however, suggests that making bread and pastry is no place for such slapdashery. Common wisdom holds that proper parsing of pie dough requires an alchemical bent, a Harry Potteresque magic repertoire augmented with a little Ph.D. level science mastery.

And so, just as I had never met a pork dish I did not like, I had never met a baking recipe that I did, at least until I cracked open Michael Ruhlman's *Ratio: The Simple Codes Behind the Craft of Everyday Cooking* (Scribner, \$27).

Though, when I first heard the title, I was skeptical. Ruhlman recently had railed against "quick-and-easy" cookbooks on his blog, writing that the conceit of such books was "fundamentally a lie." Sure, an Everyday Joe might learn to cook like a Michelin-starred chef, but certainly not easily, or in five easy steps.

And yet, here was Ruhlman, like a culinary version of the fictional symbologist Robert Langdon solving the DaVinci code, with a book suggesting that if we just learned some "simple" numbers we might become crack chefs.



Michael Ruhlman (above) argues that knowing a few culinary ratios isn't "knowing a single recipe, it's instantly knowing a thousand."

COURTESY DONNA TURNER RUHLMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

While the "simple" title of the book almost skirts that realm of eye-catching promises usually reserved for diet books ("Sit on your couch and lose weight while eating as many steaks as you like!"), it turns out that the essence of hundreds of years of culinary history, and bookshelves overstaffed with tomes from Escoffier to Emeril, can be encapsulated

quite simply.

*Ratio* is a modern culinary textbook, a smart, inspired distillation of hallowed classics such as *Larousse Gastronomique* or the Culinary Institute of America's textbook, *The New Professional Chef*.

Unlike those volumes, *Ratio* is no slog through infinite variations on the same theme, girded by thousands of recipes for mastering those techniques. In fact, you do not even have to crack open the book. The cover graphic — which shows that bread is five parts flour to three parts liquid — is really all you need.

In Ruhlman's book, recipes also are scaled down from the usual massive restaurant serving sizes to home cook's proportions. And as such, *Ratio* makes the perfect next lesson for curious home cooks lulled into the kitchen by Rachael or Martha.

What really separates *Ratio* from its forebears is that it is no mere technical manual. Chapter openings are filled with Ruhlman's passion for teaching. Recipe intros are punctuated with family history.

We learn that Ruhlman's late father, Rip, had a penchant for spice cookies and that Ruhlman's Bebob-a-Rebob Rhubarb Pie is so named for his daughter's enchantment with Garrison Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion* ditty of the same name.

There's even a philosophical aside on how the ratios for batter demonstrate the interconnectedness of life. This is a book as much for the nightstand as the kitchen counter.

STICK IT TO ME

What else can you eat on a stick at the Taste?

**Blue sausage**  
Blue Bayou, Booth 14

**Sesame beef**  
The Noodle Vietnamese Cuisine, Booth 18

**Vegetarian BBQ twist**  
Soul Vegetarian East, Booth 2

**Grilled shrimp with garlic potato**  
Oak Street Beach Cafe, Booth 41

**Frozen chocolate dipped cheesecake bar**  
JR Dessert Bakery, Booth 46

**Whole pickle**  
Vienna Beef/Gold Coast Dogs, Booth 27

