

## FAMILY RECIPES

Great Dishes From Local Chefs | By Christina Elston

# An Easy Hands-On Tomato Sauce

Phillip Martin's mother is Mexican, his grandfather is from the South, and his childhood home in East L.A. was definitely hands-on when it came to cooking. "I remember waking up, and my grandmother making tortillas by hand every single morning," says Martin. "It's a really awesome thing to wake up to."

Today, he's chef at Ray's + Stark Bar, the bar-and-restaurant combo attached to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and tucked behind the iconic Urban Light installation on Wilshire Boulevard. He's also the father of 3-year-old Mané, and he and his wife are expecting another baby in the spring. "The baby is the size of an eggplant," he told me when we spoke in early January.

Martin also runs a hands-on kitchen at home, where little Mané is already pitching in. "Whenever I cook at home, which is almost every night, I always try to get her involved," he says. "When we start cooking, she just pushes the chair to the counter and steps right up and wants to get in there."

One of Mané's, current favorite dishes is homemade basil pasta, which she and her dad make together by adding basil to a basic pasta dough recipe. "I asked her if she wanted to make green pasta, because kids definitely love color," says Martin. The two now make the dish on a regular basis.

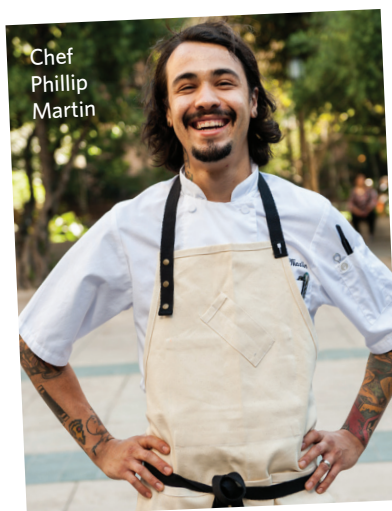
To sauce any pasta, you can't go wrong with this hands-on tomato sauce, which Ray's

+ Stark uses on the kids' pizza and pasta, and on the margherita pizza on the main menu. If you try it, you should definitely get the kids involved. "It can be really, really fun," Martin says. "With my daughter, if I let her smash tomatoes with her hands, she's going to go wild. And it's so versatile. If you want to cook it with some pasta, you can. And if you don't want to cook it, it cooks itself on top of the pizza."

One key to making this sauce delicious is to find the best-tasting canned tomatoes that you can. He likes to use San Marzano canned tomatoes because of the flavor. "I definitely spend a lot of time looking at the label, seeing where it's from," he says.

And even if you're not making this sauce with your kids, don't miss out on the hands-on fun, because it will make your sauce better. "It's really, really hard to over-process with your hands," Martin explains. "There's that attention to detail when you're using your hands and you're using your eyes and you can feel it, see it, you can even smell it because when you start breaking it up it becomes aromatic."

Martin also urges cooks to take their time even with this easy sauce. "I think that the simplest things can be the easiest to rush, and the whole fun is to break up the tomatoes with your hands, to get it to the right consistency and just to taste," he says. "I've always found that the more you taste, you're putting more love into it because you're paying attention."



Chef  
Phillip  
Martin

PHOTOS COURTESY PATINA GROUP



# Tomato Sauce from Ray's + Stark Bar



This easy tomato sauce is used on Ray's + Stark pizzas, among other dishes.

## Serves 6

2 28-ounce cans whole  
peeled tomatoes  
1 small garlic clove

2 tablespoons fresh basil  
2 tablespoons fresh oregano  
½ teaspoon (2.5 grams)  
kosher salt

Place the tomatoes in a strainer or colander set over a large bowl and let them drain for one hour, reserving the juice.

Transfer the tomatoes to another bowl and crush them with your hands until there are no pieces of tomato left that are larger than half an inch.

Add about half a cup of the reserved tomato juice to a blender, along with the garlic, basil, oregano and salt. Blend until smooth.

Add that mixture to the crushed tomatoes, along with as much reserved tomato juice as needed to reach the consistency you want.

To serve the sauce over pasta, transfer it to a pot and simmer over medium heat until it is reduced in volume by about 25%, about 20 minutes.

To serve as a pizza sauce, spread the sauce over your pizza dough and top and cook as usual. ♦

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