



Tom Douglas cooks up crabcakes at Palace Kitchen.

Tom Douglas

Follow the famed chef from croissants to cocktails

BY JESS THOMSON PHOTOGRAPH BY RON WURZER

FOR A CHEF with five Seattle restaurants, a bakery, a radio show, a stack of cookbooks, an event facility, a line of kitchen products, and always—*always*—new projects in the works, Tom Douglas is a pretty normal guy.

“I’m not a real ‘cheffy’ type,” Tom says. “I don’t wear the coat. I like our natural tendency to be pretty laid-back here in Seattle.” During the past 20 years, Seattle has taken a liking to him too. And the applewood-fired thin-crust pizzas at his latest restaurant, Serious Pie, have become a local phenomenon.

But Tom is more like your average Seattleite than a celebrity chef: He wears hiking boots to work; takes his daughter to Vera’s, the Ballard diner; and loves a good stroll through the farmers’ market. His biggest worry? “Being a good dad.”

9:16 a.m. Because of an early meeting, Tom didn’t have time to stop at Pho Bac for a bowl of steaming Vietnamese soup, his favorite breakfast, so we hit Le Panier for flaky, buttery croissants before he checks in with the chefs at Etta’s.

9:47 a.m. We head to Theo Chocolate, an all-organic, fair-trade chocolate factory in Fremont where Tom is an investor, to sample the new confection flavors.

10:40 a.m. In the car with country music blaring, Tom talks about his hopeful plans to expand Dahlia Bakery into a larger space across the street, where he envisions adding soups and sandwiches to the menu, as well as a line of new jams, dessert sauces, and bread dips.

11 a.m. Tom hops into the catering kitchen to test a new salmon recipe, then sits

down to chat with a U-Dub student interested in the restaurant business.

11:55 a.m. “I’m a shy person by nature,” Tom says, but watching him navigate his kitchens, I’m skeptical. He seems to know each of his 475 employees by name—and by the time we’ve tasted the chocolate butter pecan cookies at Dahlia Lounge; a marmalade ice cream that one of the chefs is developing in the pastry kitchen; and a Roman-style potato, rosemary, and olive oil pizza from Serious Pie (in that order), Tom has also snagged the lowdown from his managers and asked his baker for a great whole-wheat bread for the BLT he wants to put on the menu at Dahlia Lounge.

1:05 p.m. We grab a quick lunch at Saigon, the Vietnamese spot in Pike Place Market where Tom took his wife and business partner, Jackie Cross, on one of their first dates. On our walk back, Tom points out a wine shop. “Pike and Western was really the first wine shop to get behind the Washington wine thing,” he says.

1:30 p.m. Next stop: 710 KIRO’s station, where Tom interviews restaurateur and cookbook author Lidia Bastianich for his weekly radio show.

3:07 p.m. Back in the office, a big, airy room with herbs bursting out of window boxes and a drafting table in the corner (Tom plays a big role in designing his restaurants), he juggles a few of the issues that have come up during the day.

4:25 p.m. We check on a dinner for 600 that his company is catering, then make sure everything is in order for a charity event he’s hosting at the Palace Ballroom.

5:46 p.m. Tom’s daughter is away, so tonight is one of the few nights he and Jackie get to go out alone. After I leave, they’ll have a martini at the 6th Avenue Bar & Grill, then accept an award from the Food Allergy Initiative before heading to Lark for a late dinner, and perhaps to Sambar for a nightcap on the patio on the way home. That is, if Tom’s still awake—he has to get up early tomorrow to do it all again. ■

Tom’s hangouts

6th Avenue Bar & Grill \$\$\$; 2000 Sixth Ave.; 206/441-8300.

Ballard Farmers

Market 10–3 Sun; 5300 block of Ballard Ave.; 206/781-6776.

Dahlia Bakery \$; 2001 Fourth Ave.; 206/441-4540.

Dahlia Lounge \$\$\$; 2001 Fourth Ave.; 206/682-4142.

Etta’s \$\$\$; 2020 Western Ave.; 206/443-6000.

Lark \$\$\$\$; closed Mon; 926 12th Ave.; 206/323-5275.

Le Panier \$; 1902 Pike Place; 206/441-3669.

Palace Ballroom 2100 Fifth Ave.; 206/448-2001.

Palace Kitchen \$\$; 2030 Fifth Ave.; 206/448-2001.

Pho Bac \$; 1314 S. Jackson St.; 206/323-4387.

Pike and Western 1934 Pike Place; 206/441-1307.

Saigon Restaurant \$; closed Sun; 1916 Pike Place, Ste. 17; 206/448-1089.

Sambar \$\$; closed Sun–Mon; 425 N.W. Market St.; 206/781-4883.

Serious Pie \$\$\$; 316 Virginia St.; 206/838-7388.

Theo Chocolate 3400 Phinney Ave. N.; 206/632-5100.

Vera’s Restaurant \$; 5417 22nd Ave. N.W.; 206/782-9966.

INFO Listen to Tom Douglas’s Seattle Kitchen from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Saturdays on 710 KIRO. Visit www.tomdouglas.com for more on his restaurants.