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TEXT

Tan Su-Lyn wrote Lonely Planet's World Food Guide: Malaysia and Singapore, and co-authored chef, Jerome Leung's cookbook, New Shanghai Cuisine. She was formerly the managing editor of Wine & Dine magazine.

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Art Director Chris Wee's Lincoln Modern hardback book, created for SC Global, won an Asia Graphics Award in 2001. His work on Shopping magazine also won a Gold Award at Publish Asia 2002.

Miele

STEAM . THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

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STEAM THE SPIRIT OF LIFE



Steaming is a pure, simple and almost spiritual way of cooking. Dating back to prehistoric times when food was cooked over hot springs, this culinary technique has since inspired chefs across the globe to harness its delicate heat by developing implements such as multi-tiered steamers, tagines and even recipes where food is cooked en papillote (where ingredients are sealed in paper to steam in their own juices).

To steam food is to cook ingredients by enveloping them in water vapour in a sealed vessel. This method of cooking provides even, moist heat and leaves fish, poultry and vegetables naturally tender. Precious nutrients are retained. Flavours remain clean and clear. And colours stay true.

As leading creators of top-quality appliances, Miele has naturally sought to produce the ultimate steamer for the contemporary kitchen. Even so, our commitment goes well beyond simply creating a highly functional machine with a sleek design. Our goal is to ensure that having a Miele steam oven in your kitchen truly extends your dining pleasure.

Inspired by the gastronomic and health giving potential of steam cooking, we have sought out eight of Asia's top chefs, restaurateurs and culinary educators to contribute to this book. In Steam: The Spirit of Life, William Wongso (Bali), Chalida Thachalee (Bangkok), Kinsen Kam (Hong Kong), Min-Joo Park (Seoul), Su De-Xing (Shanghai), Sam Leong (Singapore), Justin Quek (Taipei) and Yoshiyuki Kawanishi (Tokyo) share not only their recipes, but also a little of their kitchen wisdom.

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STEAM . THE SPIRIT OF LIFE



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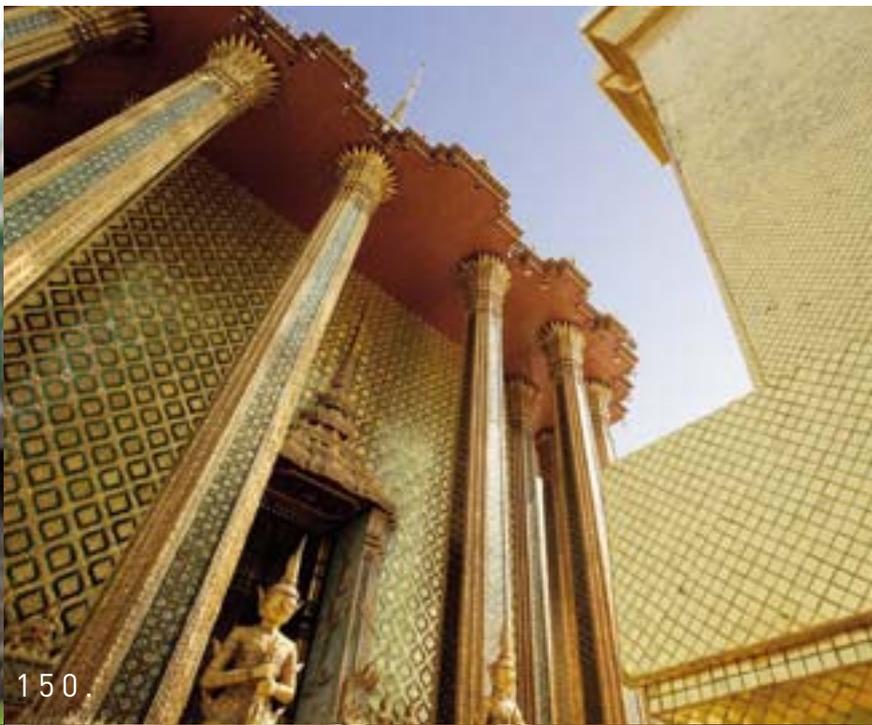


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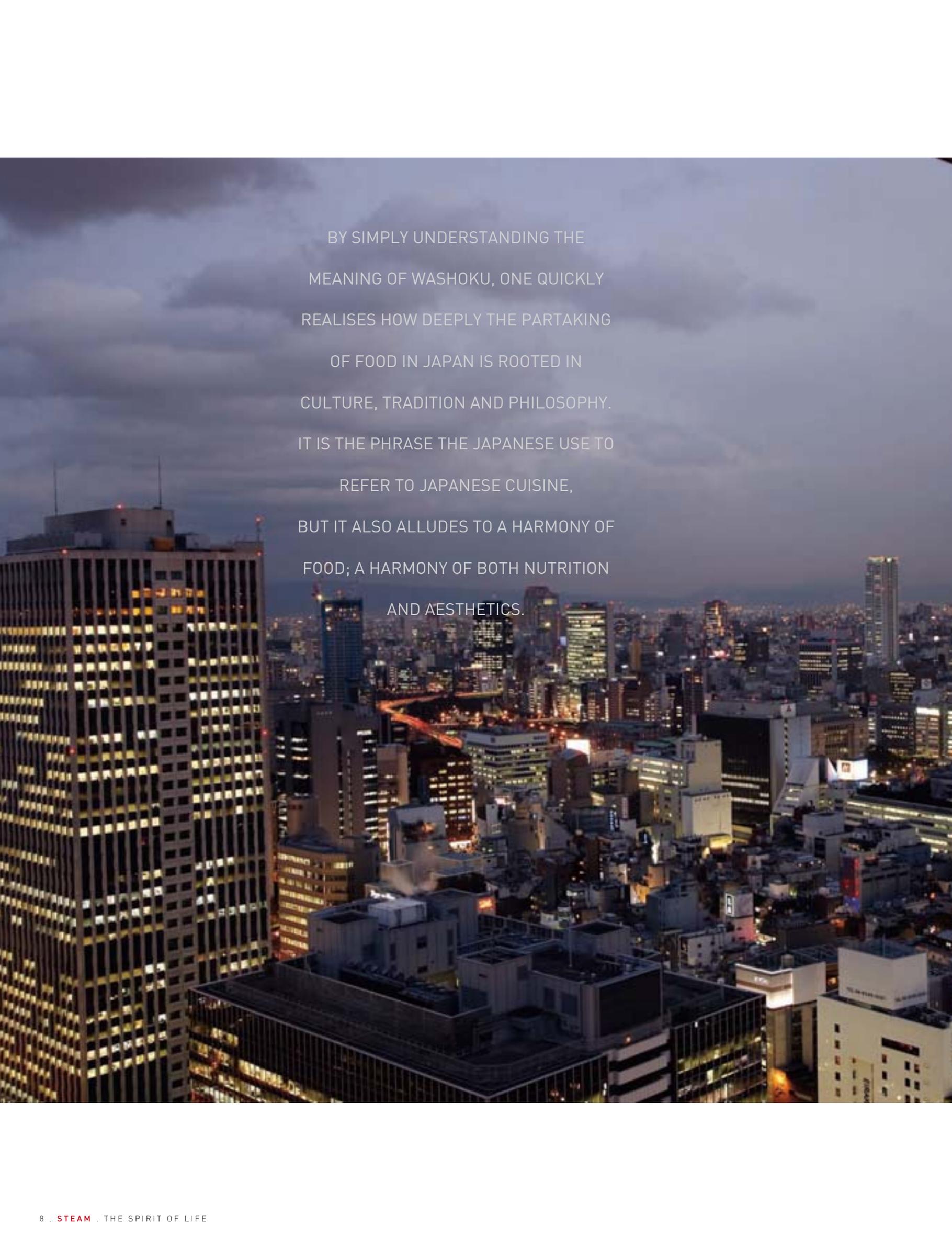


102. BALI 126. SHANGHAI 150. BANGKOK 174. HONG KONG 198. GLOSSARY OF INGREDIENTS

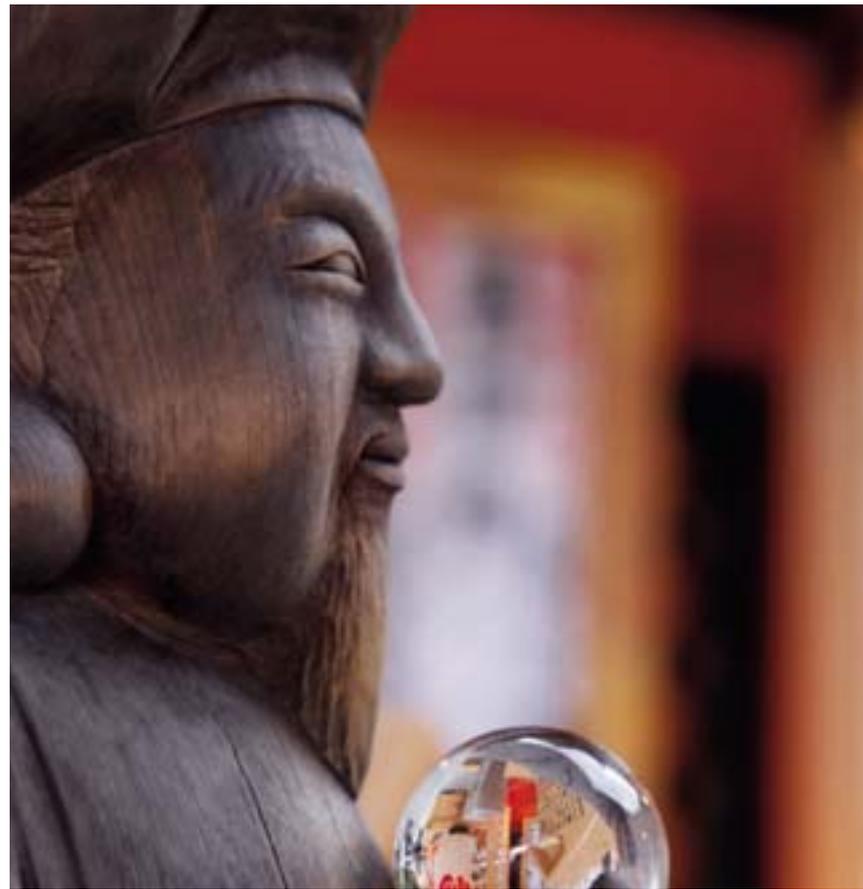


Dr Reinhard Zinkann

Dr Markus Miele



BY SIMPLY UNDERSTANDING THE
MEANING OF WASHOKU, ONE QUICKLY
REALISES HOW DEEPLY THE PARTAKING
OF FOOD IN JAPAN IS ROOTED IN
CULTURE, TRADITION AND PHILOSOPHY.
IT IS THE PHRASE THE JAPANESE USE TO
REFER TO JAPANESE CUISINE,
BUT IT ALSO ALLUDES TO A HARMONY OF
FOOD; A HARMONY OF BOTH NUTRITION
AND AESTHETICS.







Washoku is the phrase the Japanese use to refer to the food of Japan. More specifically, it identifies the cuisine indigenous to their country, and distinguishes it from the Western and Western-influenced dishes (which they call yoshoku) that are also frequently served in Japanese homes and eateries. By simply understanding the meaning of washoku, one quickly realises how deeply the partaking of food in Japan is rooted in culture, tradition and philosophy. The word 'wa' refers to all things native to Japan, but it also means harmony. 'Shoku' is anything that is consumed. Thus, washoku alludes to a harmony of food; a harmony of both nutrition and aesthetics.

According to leading English-language expert on Japanese foodways, Elizabeth Andoh, five principles guide the Japanese approach to washoku. The first three suggest that meals feature a variety of colours, flavours and methods of preparation. In essence, incorporating different coloured foods in a dish or menu makes sure that the meal offers a natural nutritional balance. Including different flavours (namely salty, sour, sweet, bitter and spicy) will create a meal which stimulates rather than overwhelms the palate. And varied methods of cooking (steaming, simmering and broiling are preferred) ensure that sugar, salt and oil are not consumed in excess. The fourth principle proposes that each dish should be created to appeal not only to one's sense of taste but also one's sense of sight, sound, smell and touch. The fifth and final principle is drawn from Buddhist philosophy and is applied to the actual partaking of a meal. Diners are reminded to give thanks to the people whose labour went into cultivating and preparing the meal (this is why the Japanese precede each meal with a slight bow and the expression 'itadakimasu' which conveys gratefulness for the meal). They are also instructed to conduct themselves











in a manner which makes them worthy of the nourishment they are about to receive; to never take their places at the table feeling angry; to eat for spiritual as well as physical well-being; and to be resolute in their endeavours to achieve enlightenment.

The Japanese meal is a painstakingly and consciously constructed signifier. One can identify each season or time of year just by observing the finer details of one's food. A preference for cold dishes in the summer and comforting stews in the winter are obvious variations that are common among other cuisines, but at the Japanese table, a diner is able to differentiate between seasons simply by looking at his *suimono* (a clear soup which is commonly served as part of every meal) and its garnish. The kinds of plates and bowls used vary with the seasons. Even teacups with special motifs are only brought out when they are suited to the time of year!



The food of Tokyo is characterised by a preference for intensely flavoured *dashi* (stock) made with dried bonito. *Dashi* is the basis of Japanese soups, dips and simmered dishes, and is also used in cooking fish and vegetables. Thus, Tokyo's potent *dashi* attaches a distinctive taste to most of the food that emerges from its kitchens. The neon-lit, buzzing metropolis has a magnificently cosmopolitan dining scene (all the top French, English and American chefs seem to have outposts here), but *soba* (buckwheat noodles enjoyed with a dark, strong dipping sauce called *tsuyu* in Tokyo) and *sushi* remain the twin gastronomic loves of Tokyoites. In fact, it was a Tokyo chef who introduced the use of rice vinegar into the preparation of *sushi* rice in the 17th century. Yet another thought to add raw fish to vinegared rice in the 1820s, which is *sushi* as we know it today!





STEAM

THERE ARE MANY ADVANTAGES TO STEAM COOKING. INGREDIENTS COOK MORE EVENLY. THERE IS NO LOSS OF VITAMINS AND MINERALS OR SACRIFICE OF NATURAL FLAVOUR AND COLOUR. AND THE POSSIBILITY OF SCORCHING IS ELIMINATED. STEAMED FOOD ALSO RETAINS ITS SHAPE AND IS DONE TO A PERFECT TENDERNESS. HOWEVER, TO BE ABLE TO MASTER THE PRECISE TECHNIQUES OF STEAMING IN A TRADITIONAL KITCHEN REQUIRES EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING. WITH A STEAM OVEN, ON THE OTHER HAND, YOU CAN OBTAIN ALL THE BENEFITS OF STEAMING WITH HARDLY ANY TRAINING AT ALL!

YOSHIYUKI KAWANISHI

Yoshiyuki Kawanishi There is no doubting the intensity of Yoshiyuki Kawanishi's culinary passion. Even as a junior high school student, he had entertained thoughts of entering the field of cooking. "Since I was a latchkey kid," the Kansai native says, "I first became interested in cooking when I started cooking for myself. It was fun to shake a pan and I naturally developed an ability to cook by copying what my mother did."

"When I was in junior high, I talked to my mother about becoming a chef, but she persuaded me to finish high school first. Then, during my high school years, I met two friends. Together, we dreamt of opening a restaurant. Again, I consulted my parents, but they disagreed! I gave up that dream. I went on to college and studied very hard to become an accountant."

Upon graduation, Kawanishi joined the accounting department of a wholesale company which sold mechanical tools but was soon assigned to the sales department. It was at this juncture that his childhood dream of becoming a chef resurfaced. Throwing caution to the wind, he spent a year studying the basics of cooking at Tsuji Cooking School before taking on the taxing 4pm to 2am shift at a late-night restaurant. Remarkably, this was how the culinary career of the Professor of Japanese Cooking at Tsuji Cooking Technique Laboratory began. His attitude towards the demanding training of his early years as a kitchen ingénue can only be described as philosophical. "It is very hard to master the secrets of any profession," he explains. "Since I chose to join the cooking world myself, I never thought of my training as arduous at all."

If given the chance to start over, the professor is certain that he would still want to become a chef. "However," he says, "I started learning to cook pretty late. If possible, I would have liked to become a chef at a younger age."





Tsuji is the largest cooking school in the Japan and is based in Osaka. It has approximately 20 schools spread throughout Japan and overseas which are associated with it. Many of Japan's top chefs have trained at Tsuji. According to Professor Kawanishi, the most important thing a chef needs to understand, in order to distinguish himself from among his peers, is that one cooks to entertain guests. "It is important to keep your guests in mind when you create dishes," he insists. That includes thinking about presentation. Within the Japanese culinary tradition, there is a highly developed art to plating food in a way which accentuates the beauty of both the receptacle and the item meant to be eaten. Food should not be considered purely functional. Neither should it just be created for mere ingestion.

Beyond that, a good chef needs to have the ability to utilise readily obtainable ingredients. "A chef has to learn to be able to use what is at hand when specific seasonal ingredients are not available," Kawanishi points out. Versatility, however, should not be equated with a disregard for tradition. "Japanese traditions are gradually breaking down," the dedicated educator laments. "I want to pass on the real significance of Japanese cooking to younger generations. For the same reason, I prefer orthodox cookbooks which carry on the tradition of Japanese cooking."

On the other hand, he insists that cooking should not be a regimental experience. "Always imagine ways to create fun," the chef advises. "Set yourself targets. If, at first, you take one hour to peel 100 potatoes, challenge yourself to think of a way to shorten the time to 50 minutes the next time you do it!" Such is Kawanishi's unwavering dedication to his craft.







COLOURFUL STEAMED TOMATOES

Serves 4

- 4 tomatoes (approximately 165g each)
- 4 tiger prawns
- 4 scallops
- 1 green asparagus
- 4 hiratake oyster mushrooms (may be substituted with other mushrooms or a vegetable)
- 600ml dashi broth (see right)
- 30ml (2Tbsp) sake
- 1/2tsp salt
- 10ml (2tsp) soy sauce

Chervil for garnish

Halve tomatoes. Scoop out seeds and some of the flesh. Peel the tiger prawns, discarding the heads and veins. Leave the tails as they are. Rinse with cold water and pat dry.

Halve the scallops vertically. Cut green asparagus into 4cm lengths. Remove the hard tip of the hiratake mushrooms. Separate the mushrooms into small bunches.

Combine dashi broth, sake, salt and soy sauce. Bring to a boil. Put the tiger prawns, scallops, green asparagus and hiratake mushrooms in the tomato halves and place them in a steamer tray together with the tomato flesh. Pour the broth mixture into the tray. Steam at 90 degrees Celsius for 8 minutes.

Place steamed tomatoes on a plate. Garnish with broth and chervil.

DASHI BROTH

Makes 1l

- 20g konbu (dried kelp)
- 30g dried bonito flakes

Wipe the surface of the konbu quickly with a damp paper towel without removing the white powder on its surface because it contains flavour and minerals. Place the konbu into 1l of water. Bring to a boil, uncovered. Immediately remove konbu once water boils.

Add another 4Tbsp tap water to bring the temperature of the boiling water down. Immediately add the bonito flakes. Continue to heat until the water returns to the boil. Then remove from the fire. Allow the flakes to settle at the bottom of the pot. Remove the foam on the surface of the dashi and strain the liquid before use.





SAKE-STEAMED CHICKEN BREAST

Serves 4

200ml water
 200ml sake
 5g konbu (dried kelp)
 2 chicken breasts (skin removed, 240g per piece)
 15g Welsh onion (green part only)
 20g ginger, thinly sliced
 1 grapefruit (600g)
 50g asatsuki (chives)

Sesame vinegar
 45g (3Tbsp) ground sesame sugar
 1/2Tbsp sugar
 15ml vinegar
 15ml soy sauce
 15ml dashi broth (refer to page 24)
 45g Welsh onion, minced
 10g ginger, peeled and minced



Combine the water, sake and konbu (steaming liquid). Bring to a boil then cool.

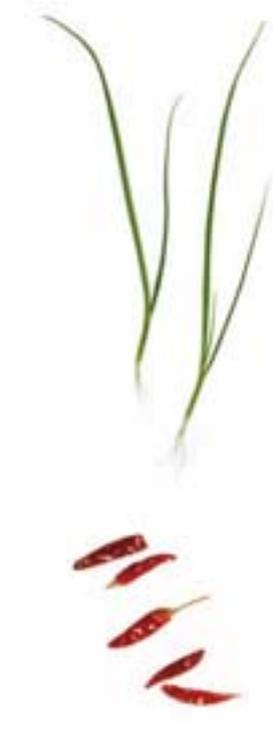
Place the chicken breasts, green part of the Welsh onion, ginger and steaming liquid in a re-sealable freezer bag and close the zip. Steam at 80 degrees Celsius for 20 minutes. Remove and place the bag in ice water to cool.

Peel the grapefruit and carefully cut out segments. Cut off the roots of the chives. Place the chives directly onto the steamer tray and steam at 80 degrees Celsius for 1 minute.

Combine the sesame vinegar ingredients in the order listed and mix. Refrigerate to allow flavours to blend.

Discard the steaming liquid in the re-sealable freezer bag. Cut the chicken into bite-size portions. Serve on a plate with grapefruit, chives (cut into 3cm lengths), Welsh onion and ginger. Pour the sesame vinegar over the dish.





CLAMS STEAMED IN SWEET AND PEPPERY VEGETABLE SAUCE

Serves 4

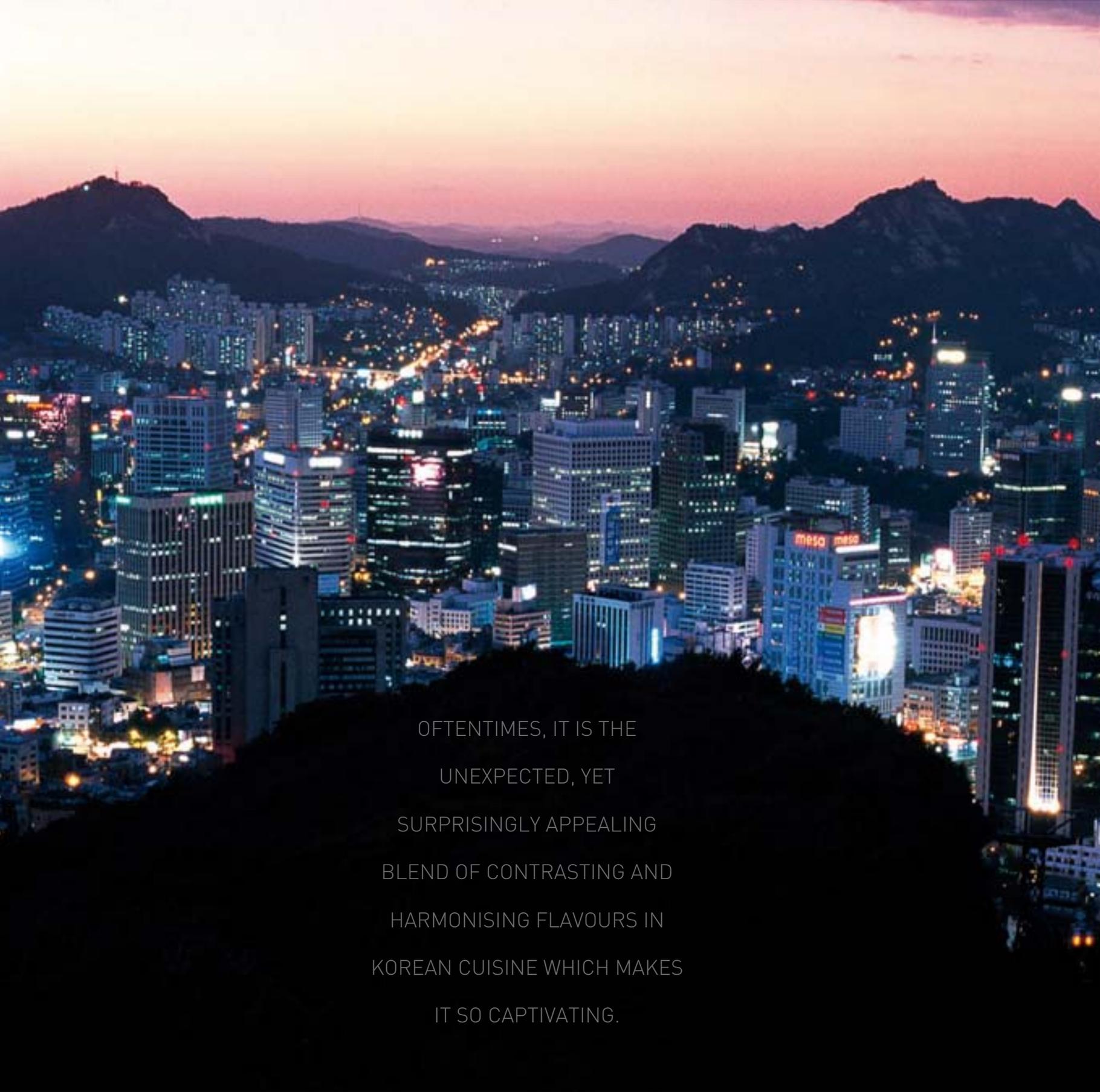
- 800g clams (can be substituted with mussels)
- 10ml sesame oil
- 50ml sake
- 50ml soy sauce
- 10g ginger, peeled and minced
- 1 red chilli, sliced
- 8g asatsuki (chives), finely chopped for garnish

Wash clams with water. Place them in a heatproof dish.

In a separate bowl, mix the sesame oil, sake, soy sauce, ginger and red pepper. Pour over the clams.

Steam at 90 degrees Celsius for 10 minutes and garnish with chives before serving





OFTENTIMES, IT IS THE
UNEXPECTED, YET
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BLEND OF CONTRASTING AND
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KOREAN CUISINE WHICH MAKES
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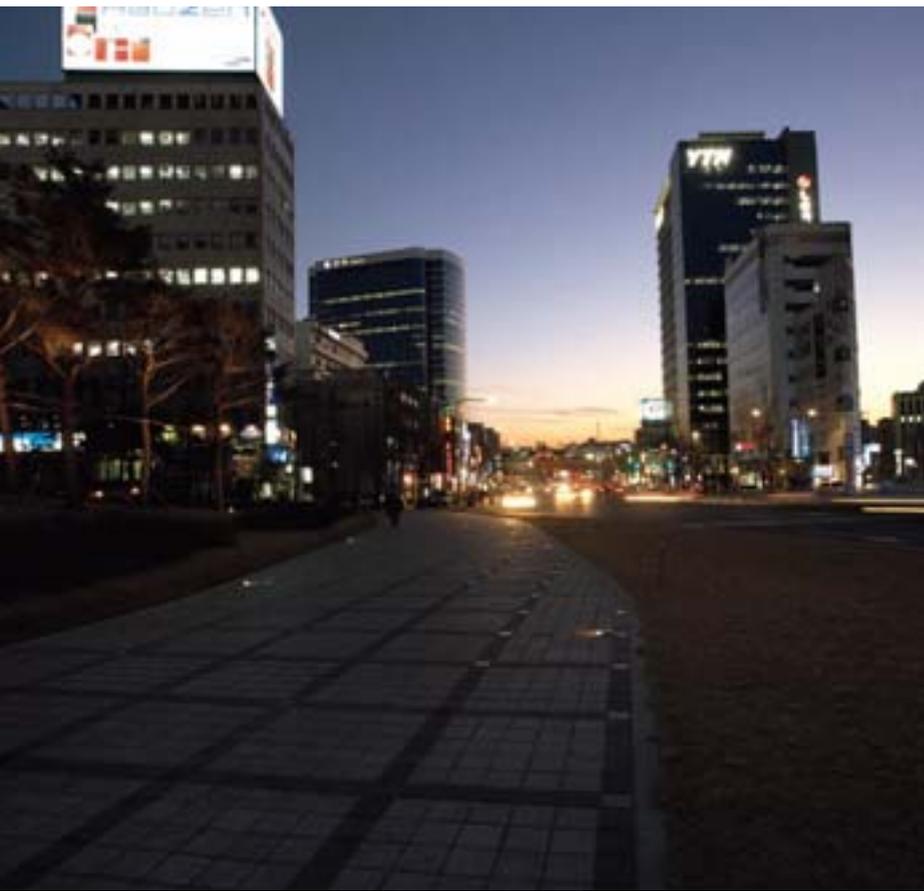




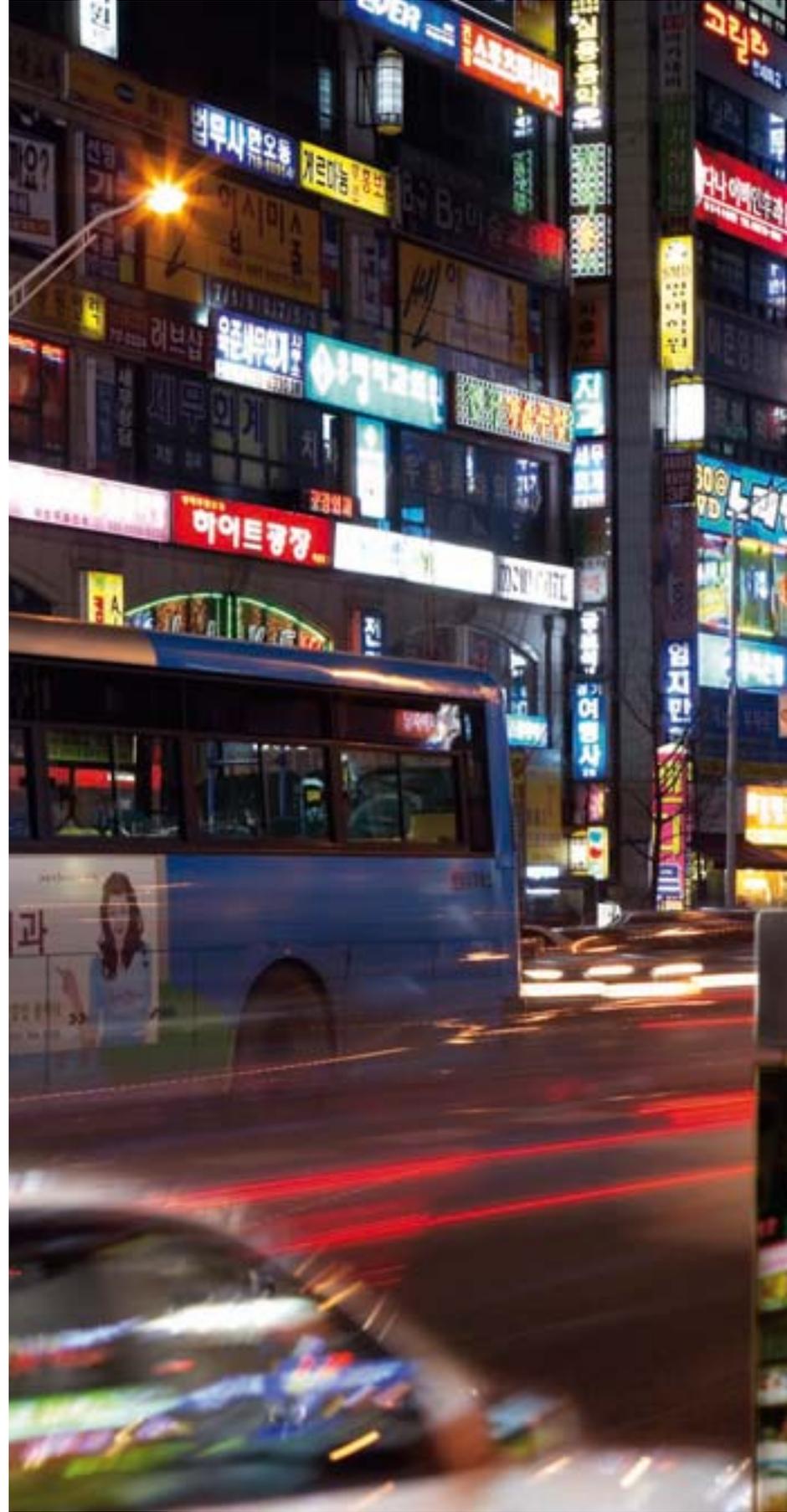


Koreans have a phrase that captures the essence of their cuisine most succinctly. It describes their food as being pleasingly sour, sweet, spicy, deliciously fiery, salty, bitter and nutty. This may seem like quite a mouthful, but it is the unexpected, yet surprisingly appealing blend of these contrasting and harmonising flavours which makes Korean cuisine so captivating.

In the Korean kitchen, sour flavours are introduced in the form of vinegar and acidic fruits, while sweetness traditionally appears in the form of honey, sugar and sweet fruits such as jujubes (dried red dates). Piquant Korean hot peppers are absolutely essential and are used to achieve two levels of spiciness. The first is the polite, comfortable burn which one may refer to as interestingly spicy. It injects vivacity into dishes. (In Korea, even raw fish sashimi is seasoned with hot peppers.) However, true Korean hot pepper devotees also live for what they call 'olkunham', a deliciously fiery hotness which can make a diner break into sweat the moment it hits his palate. For saltiness, soy sauce, fish sauce, salted (or fermented) shrimp and fermented bean paste (toenjang) may be employed in place of salt. Ginseng, ginger, berries, seeds, vegetables and herbs are added for their pleasing bitterness. Finally, gingko nuts, pine nuts, chestnuts and sesame seeds are used to give dishes a nutty flavour.



The Korean diet has also long been guided by the belief that food is a form of medication. It follows that what one chooses to eat ought to serve as a long-term protection against ill health as well. Kimchi is thus savoured not only for its addictive flavour, but for the minerals, lactic acid and high levels of Vitamin B it contains. Garlic, which is often eaten raw, is valued because it cleanses one's blood and aids digestion. Hot peppers and ginseng are prized for their









ability to help keep out the cold during the severely chilly winter months. And the juice extracted from slow-simmered tripe—which is considered a tonic—is favoured for its invigorating qualities.

The food of Seoul in particular, is especially diverse because the city has served as the country's capital for over six centuries. Naturally, a great proportion of ingredients and cooking techniques from across the peninsula have found their way here to what is historically the heart of Korea. From 1392 until 1910 the city was home to the Yi (or Joseon) dynasty, one of the longest dynasties in history. Throughout this era, members of the royal court and the yangban (the scholarly upper class of the time) were served meals that took days to prepare. In addition to the fixed selection of rice, soup, kimchi and sauces, royals were presented with 12 side dishes (called a 12-cheop meal) all placed in a specific sequence. There were even maps to indicate the traditional placement of each dish!



Today, parts of this highly sophisticated court cuisine have been assimilated into the diets of regular Koreans. Sollongtang, for example, is said to be the name of the altar in central Seoul upon which kings once made ritual offerings at harvest time. Traditionally, the offerings would include a soup made from a specially slaughtered cow which both royals and ordinary folk alike partook of after the ceremonial prayers. Now, sollongtang refers to a soup made with beef knuckle bones, tripe, intestines, brisket and shin that is considered very much part of Seoul's cuisine. Even more iconic is beef bulgogi which consists of marinated beef steaks first sliced then grilled over a charcoal fire and served with lettuce salad. This continues to be the dish Korean hosts insist on serving when they entertain special guests.





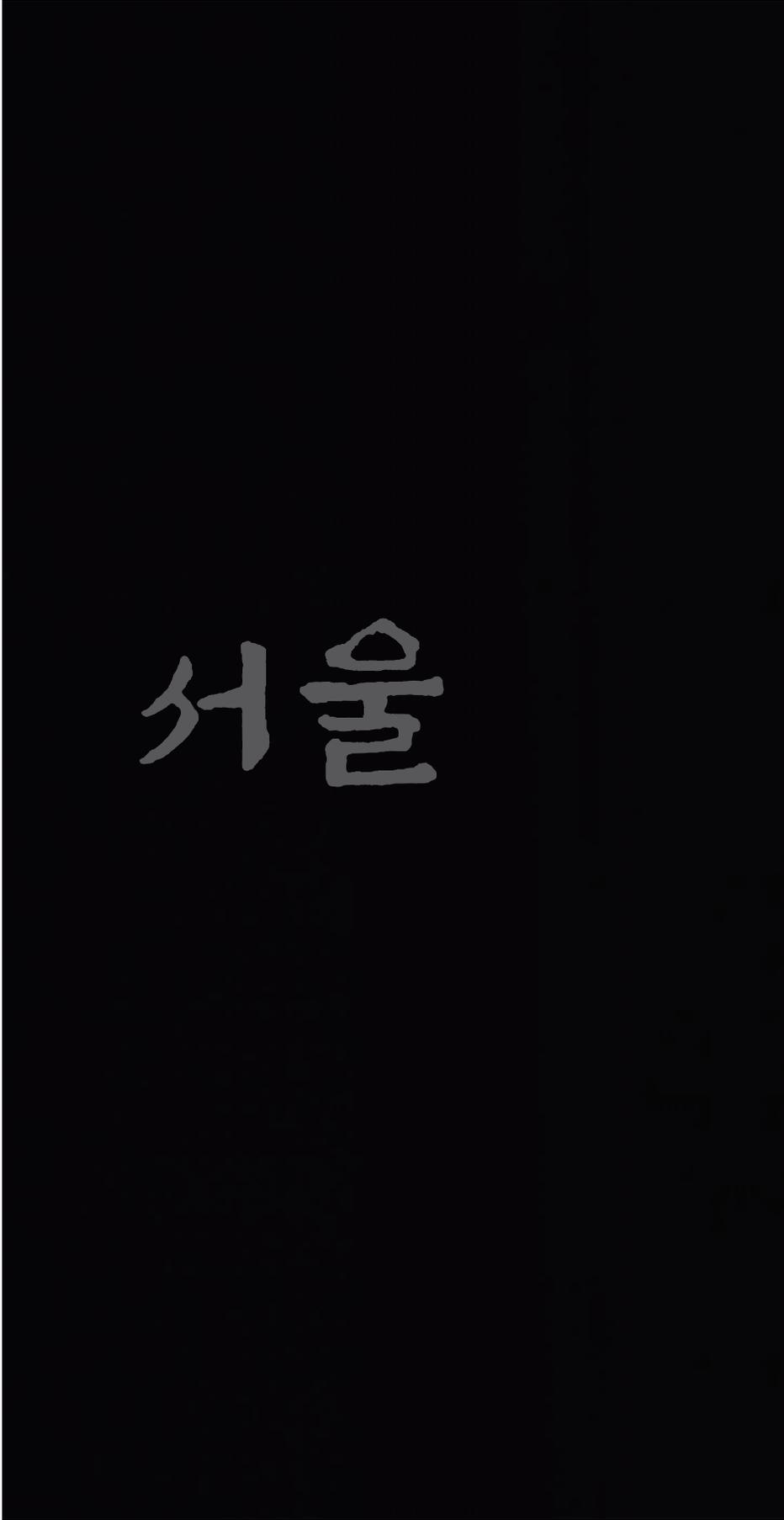
STEAM

STEAMING FOOD USING CONVENTIONAL METHODS IS OFTEN CONSIDERED TOO TIME CONSUMING AMONG BUSY HOMECOOKS. HOWEVER, KOREANS GREATLY VALUE TRADITION AND TAKE SPECIAL CARE WHEN PREPARING FOOD FOR FESTIVALS, WEDDINGS, BIRTHDAYS AND CEREMONIES HELD IN MEMORY OF ANCESTORS. IT IS AT THESE EVENTS THAT STEAMED MEAT, FISH, CHICKEN AND RICE CAKES ARE SERVED.

MIN-JOO PARK

Min-Joo Park When Min-Joo Park tried cooking cuttlefish for the first time, she kept checking it for doneness by skewering it and did so several times. “By the time it was done,” she says light-heartedly, “it had so many holes in it that it looked like it had been shot by a gun!” Nevertheless, the owner of the cooking school, Min-Joo Park’s Home Art has come a long way from her early, exploratory days in the kitchen. For one, Park has spent the past ten years studying at Le Cordon Bleu and the Italian Culinary Institute for Foreigners (ICIF), as well as various other culinary institutes in Shanghai and Japan. She has also trained under Hae-Sung Whang, a renowned expert on Korean court cuisine. Her recipes have regularly appeared in popular Korean magazines and she has made appearances on cooking programmes broadcast by major Korean television stations. The nation’s celebrities and elite are also regulars at her cooking classes. Park says that she loves cooking so much that she often dreams of it in her sleep! It is hard to imagine that this energetic proponent of Korean cuisine only stumbled upon her career because she grew weary of her life as a housewife.

According to Park, when she was a young woman, Korean society was very conservative. Back then, a married woman was simply expected to devote her entire life to being a good wife and mother. After her own marriage, Park found that she yearned for more to her life and decided to look for a job. She first started selling cookware. To boost lacklustre sales figures, she learned to cook and eventually used her cooking classes to market her products. Park’s initial success in the kitchen inspired her to pursue further training under famous Korean culinary masters and enrol in short-term courses at major international culinary institutes. According to her, this was one of the common routes chefs in her day took to acquire professional skills.



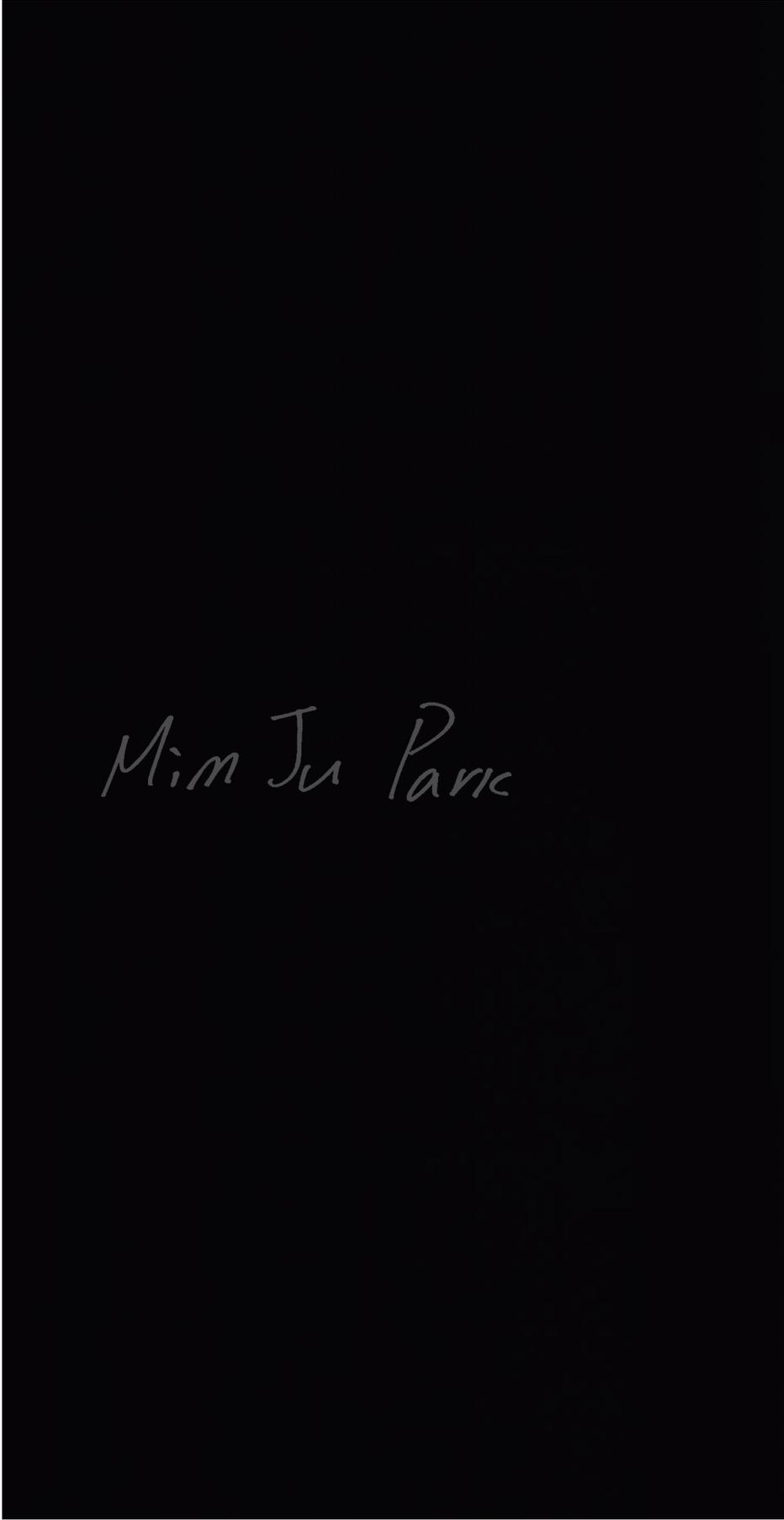
서울



Although Park finds herself having to constantly work around a tight schedule, two of the Korean dishes she most enjoys preparing are kimchi (fermented spicy vegetables) and sliced vegetables preserved in soy sauce. “They are typical Korean foods which take a lot of effort and time to prepare,” she explains. “I regret that these days most housewives prefer to purchase such basic food items readymade at the market.” Park hopes to hand down the recipes to these dishes, as well as the methods for making soy sauce and Korean hot pepper sauce, to another generation of young chefs.

However, she admits that Korean cooks’ style of never really measuring ingredient quantities when preparing food can make it a challenge for others to learn how to cook Korean food. “My mother’s generation of cooks did not measure things when they added ingredients to dishes,” she says. “Whenever I asked my mother for recipes, she would always give me approximate quantities for the ingredients.” Thus, in Park’s opinion, a good chef needs to have keen senses and an instinct for keeping a mental track of measurements. “The older generation of chefs cooked without keeping to a precise system of ingredient measurement,” she reiterates. “So the taste of dishes varied depending on the situation. It is not an exaggeration for me to emphasise that exact measurements are essential in cooking because they enable everyone to become excellent cooks.”

Park’s favourite foods are spicy ones. She particularly enjoys stews with Korean hot pepper sauce. “I think spicy food energises people,” the cooking instructor theorises. “I often cook hot stew for my family, adding mushrooms and various vegetables to it. When my son had to serve in the army—all Korean young men have to—this was the dish he missed most!”



Mim Ju Park





KOREAN RICE CAKES

Serves 5

30g red beans (adzuki)
30g green beans
30g kidney beans
15g brown sugar
40g walnuts, skinned
40g chestnuts, shelled and skinned
70g pine nuts



Dough
600g glutinous rice flour (chapssal karu) or short-grain rice flour (ssalgaru)



2tsp ground cinnamon or to taste
1tsp baking soda
2tsp baking powder
130g brown sugar
280ml milk
1tsp salt

Soak the beans in separate bowls of water for 8 to 12 hours. Drain and steam them in separate heatproof bowls at 100 degrees Celsius for 35 minutes. Add 5g of sugar to each and cook separately on the stove until most of the moisture has evaporated. Mash the beans separately.

If using short-grain rice flour, sift it four times. Mix all the ingredients for the dough in a bowl. Add the cooked beans, walnuts, chestnuts and pine nuts. Place in a heatproof container and steam at 100 degrees Celsius for 40 minutes.

Allow to cool. Roll it up in cling film and cut into slices.





NUTRITIOUS RICE

Serves 5

450g	short-grain rice
90g	glutinous rice (can be substituted with more short-grain rice)
1.2l	sea tangle (kelp) extract
5	pieces fried bean curd
150g	chestnuts, shelled and skinned
5	pyogo (shitake) mushrooms
30g	carrots, peeled
40g	jujubes (dried red dates)
1tsp	sesame oil
30g	gingko nuts, shelled and skinned
50g	pine nuts
2tsp	soy sauce
Sauce	
100ml	soy sauce
1Tbsp	sesame oil
1Tbsp	sesame seeds
1tsp	minced garlic
50g	spring onions, chopped
1/4tsp	Korean hot red pepper powder (kochu karu)
3	Korean hot green peppers, chopped
3	pyogo (shitake) or champignon mushrooms, chopped

Wash both kinds of rice and soak them in 600ml of sea tangle extract for 10 minutes.

Scald the fried bean curd in hot water to remove excess oil. Finely dice the chestnuts, pyogo mushrooms, carrots and fried bean curd.

Soak the jujubes in boiling water for a short while. Dry with a paper towel. Cut the jujubes into gingko nut-size pieces.

Drain the rice. Mix the sesame oil into the rice. Add the chestnuts, gingko nuts, pyogo mushrooms and fried bean curd. Fry for 5 minutes. Place

in a heatproof bowl and cover with another 600ml of sea tangle extract. Steam at 100 degrees Celsius for 25 minutes. Add the carrots, pine nuts and jujubes. Steam for another 10 minutes. Mix the rice with the soy sauce and cook at 100 degrees Celsius for yet another 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, prepare the sauce. Pour soy sauce into a small bowl. Add the sesame oil, sesame seeds, garlic, chopped spring onions and hot pepper powder. Just before starting the meal, add the chopped hot green peppers and mushrooms to the sauce.

Chef's note:

To make sea tangle extract, add a piece of sea tangle (kelp), some dried anchovies, a few cloves of garlic and some spring onions to a pot of water. Boil for 5 to 10 minutes and strain before use. If you prefer stronger tasting sea tangle extract, boil it for a longer time.





CHICKEN SOUP

Serves 2

- 180g glutinous rice (can be substituted with short-grain rice)
- 1 chicken (approximately 800 to 900g)
- 1Tbsp coarse salt
- 1 to 2 undried (fresh) ginseng roots
- 6 jujubes (dried red dates)
- 6 chestnuts, shelled and skinned
- 6 cloves garlic, peeled
- 10g ginger, peeled and sliced
- Salt and pepper to taste



Sliced spring onions for garnish

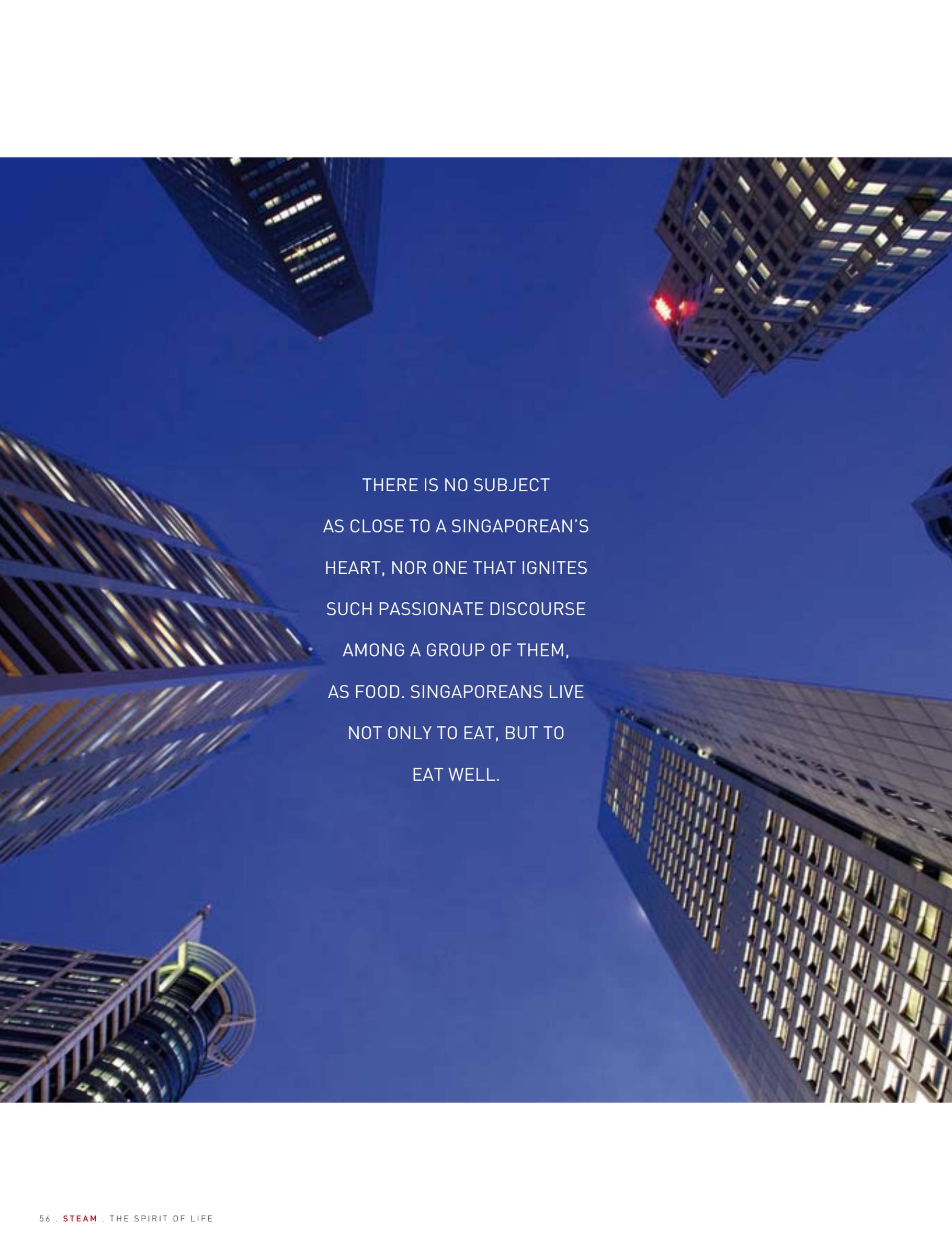
Soak the glutinous rice in water for 24 hours. Clean the chicken and rub it with coarse salt and some pepper.

Stuff the drained rice, undried ginseng, jujubes and chestnuts into the chicken cavity and fold the legs over one another to create a cross. Place the chicken in a heatproof container and pour 600ml of water over it. Add the garlic and ginger. Steam at 90 degrees Celsius for 20 minutes then raise the temperature to 100 degrees Celsius and steam it for a further 30 minutes.

Serve the chicken soup in a bowl and garnish it with spring onions. Season with salt and pepper to taste.



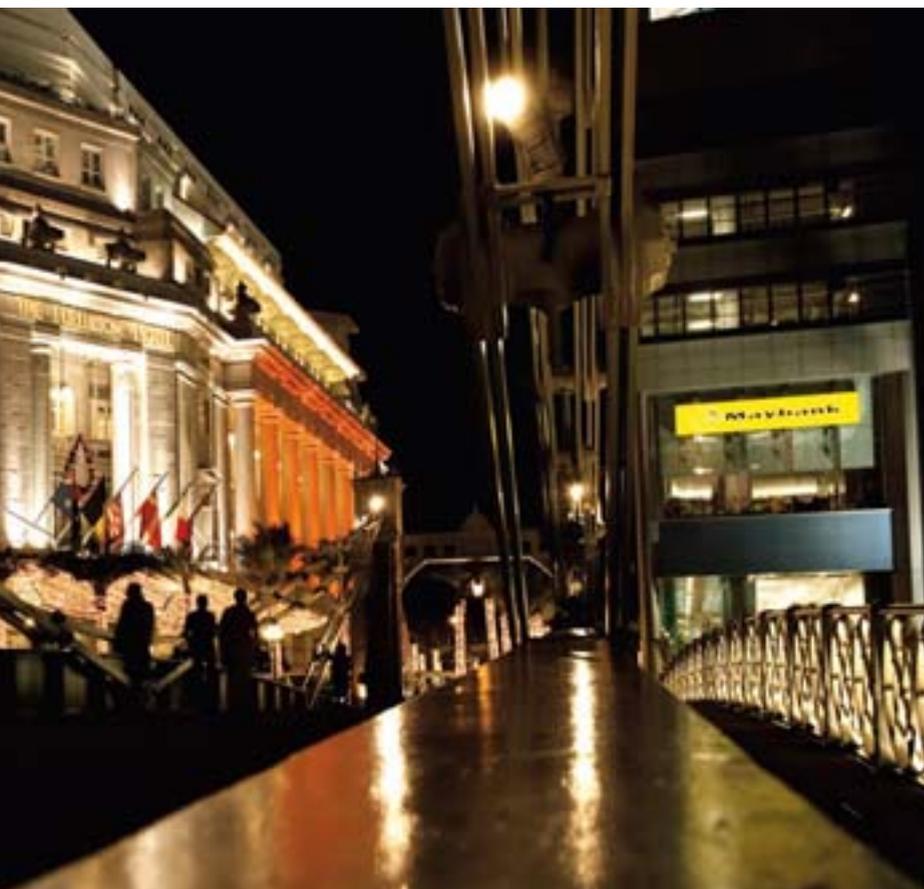
SINGAPORE



THERE IS NO SUBJECT
AS CLOSE TO A SINGAPOREAN'S
HEART, NOR ONE THAT IGNITES
SUCH PASSIONATE DISCOURSE
AMONG A GROUP OF THEM,
AS FOOD. SINGAPOREANS LIVE
NOT ONLY TO EAT, BUT TO
EAT WELL.







Situated at the focal point of many major trade routes crisscrossing Asia, Singapore is blessed with a fascinating melting pot of culinary traditions. While one may be able to distinguish the cuisines of the Chinese, Malays and Indians—as well as those of the Peranakans and Eurasians—and identify the influences of the British, Portuguese and Dutch, it is also clear that these culinary delineations have not remained impervious. In this part of the world, Chinese noodle dishes are invariably served with a tiny saucer filled with sliced chillies or some other piquant condiment. Living alongside chilli-adoring Malays and Indians has encouraged the Chinese to develop an appreciation for spiciness. Breakfast Singapore-style may well consist of a slice of French toast served with kaya (a coconut egg jam that has Portuguese roots), soft-boiled eggs topped with thick, dark Chinese soy sauce and a dash of white pepper, and a strong coffee sweetened with condensed milk. Fusion is too strong a word to use to describe this osmosis-like adoption of gastronomic traditions borne out of harmonious age old co-existence. Singaporean food is one of evolution, a gentle rubbing away of clear lines of distinction.



There is no subject as close to a Singaporean's heart, nor one that ignites such passionate discourse among a group of them, as food. Singaporeans live not only to eat, but to eat well. The city-state has been described as a culinary paradise. While its restaurant scene rivals those of most other major Asian cities, the true essence of Singaporean food resides in its hawker centres and coffee shops—casual eateries a few steps up from street-side stalls—where many locals head to for a great meal. Again, what is remarkable about this gastronomic experience is that one's meal does not necessarily have to be constructed along the rules of a single culinary tradition. It is not uncommon for a diner to have a plate of Chinese char kway teow (a wok-fried flat noodle dish) and satay (barbecued skewers of meat,









a dish of Arabic origin) for dinner. Fresh fruit juice stalls are lined up alongside stands selling teh tarik (pulled tea), a drink believed to have Indian origins. Malay nasi lemak (coconut rice served with fried anchovies, cucumber slices and a chilli paste) vies for your attention around the corner from a chicken rice stall. Variety is truly the spice of life here.

The now-iconic chilli crab dish is another nod to Singapore's multicultural heritage. Although crab curries do exist within the Indian culinary tradition, Singaporean chilli crab has a thick, sweet and spicy sauce quite unlike any Indian curry. The dish is said to have been created by Chinese restaurateur, Lim Choon Ngee who owned a seafood restaurant located along the Kallang River. Another dish closely associated with the Lion City, fish head curry (a large, meaty fish head served in Indian curry) also has an interesting history. It was created by an Indian restaurateur in a bid to draw more Chinese diners to his restaurant!



In addition to hawker food, Singapore is home to an indigenous cuisine (also found in neighbouring Melaka and Penang), known as either Nonya or Peranakan. The Peranakans are predominantly descendants of male Chinese merchants who settled along the Straits of Melaka and took Malay brides in the 15th century. The women in this ethnic minority are called Nonyas and the men, Babas. Their cuisine is an elaborate and artful blend reflecting the cultural mix of their community—Malay ingredients and spices are prepared using Chinese cooking techniques and influenced by elements of Indian, Thai and Portuguese Eurasian cuisines. Classic dishes include babi pong teh (stewed pork), ayam buah keluak (chicken with buah keluak, a black nut from Indonesia) and laksa (a spicy noodle dish which the Nonyas serve in a broth heavily enriched with coconut milk).





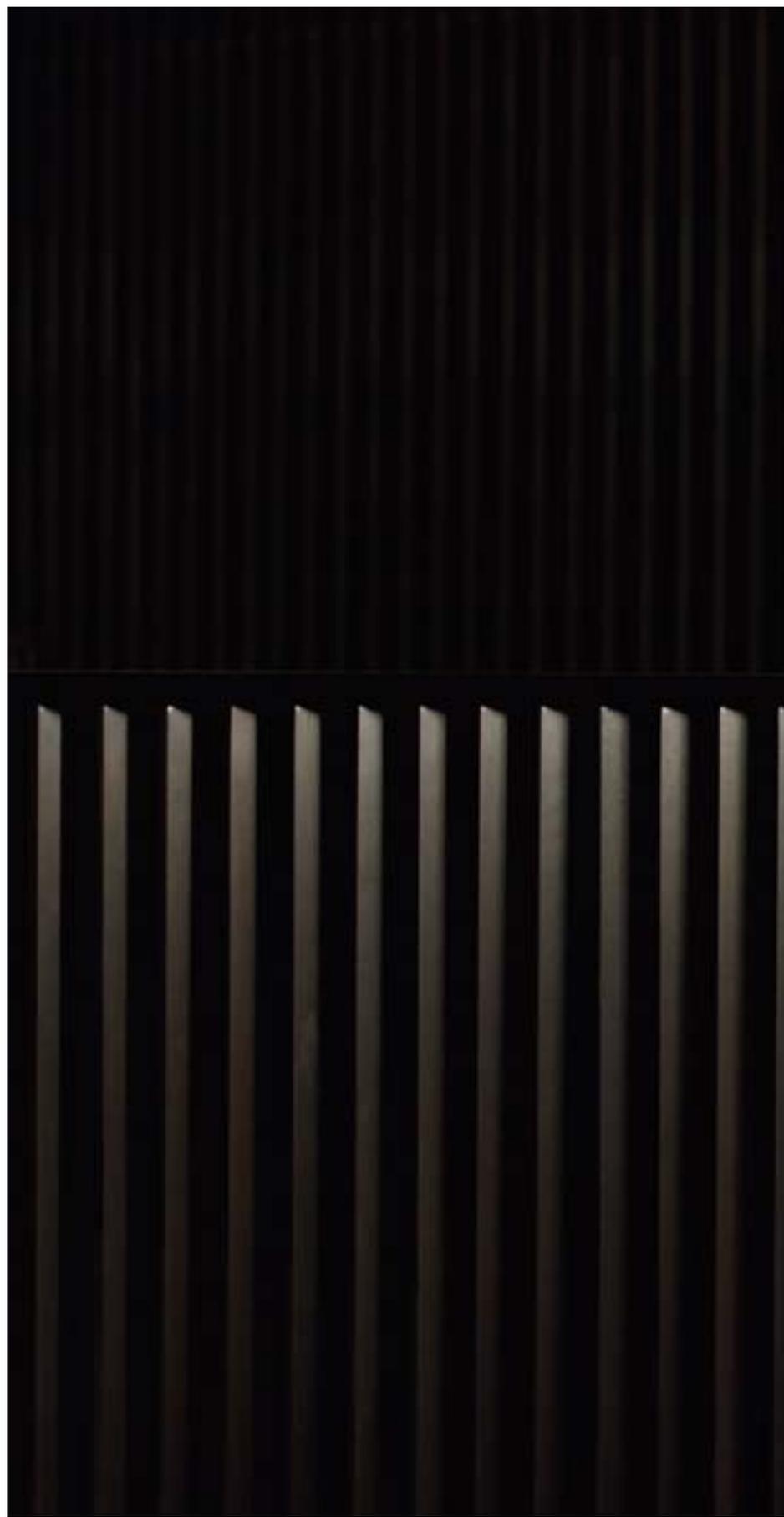
STEAM

IN THE CHINESE KITCHEN, WE DEEP-FRY AND WOK-FRY A LOT OF OUR FOOD. BUT WHEN YOU TASTE SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN FRIED, YOUR TASTE BUDS ARE FIRST HIT BY THE FLAVOUR OF THE FRIED EXTERIOR RATHER THAN BY WHAT'S INSIDE. BY INTRODUCING STEAMED COMPONENTS INTO SOME OF MY DISHES, I AM ABLE TO EXTEND THE GASTRONOMIC POTENTIAL OF MY PRODUCE. STEAMING RETAINS THE INHERENT FLAVOUR OF AN INGREDIENT AND ENABLES ME TO SHOWCASE IT TO THE FULLEST EXTENT IN MY FINISHED DISH. **SAM LEONG**

Sam Leong cuts a striking figure in the kitchen with his funky leopard-print pants and chef's whites. His bold sartorial style alone leaves no doubt that this boyish-looking master chef is no ordinary Chinese chef. The director of kitchens of the Tung Lok group of restaurants in Singapore was one of the pioneers of contemporary Chinese cuisine in the early Nineties and continues to be a strong driving force behind the movement.

It was a guest chef stint in 1996, at the Wolfgang-Lazaroff American Food and Wine Festival in Los Angeles (an annual charity fundraising event that benefits Meals-on-Wheels programs) that Leong's now signature pork ribs with coffee sauce first won him recognition as a contemporary Chinese chef both abroad and at home. He was then executive chef at Jiang Nan Chun, the Chinese restaurant at the Four Seasons Hotel, Singapore. When he first sent Wolfgang Puck his recipe, the internationally renowned celebrity chef-restaurateur tried to talk him out of serving it. "He asked me if I was crazy," says Leong, a coffee-lover who downs six to seven cups of the drink a day. "But in the end, the diners liked it. And when I came back to Singapore, I was suddenly famous." The dish remains one of his favourite creations.

In truth, it is Leong's persistence at fashioning modern Chinese dishes, plating them individually in the style of Western dinner service without losing the essential taste of Chinese cuisine which has undoubtedly earned him celebrity over the years. His unwavering commitment to his own culinary vision in the face of naysayers marks him out as a bona fide trailblazer. He has a remarkable talent for being able to effortlessly blend east and west, as well as tradition and innovation both on the plate and palate. When The New York Times' roving gourmet, R.W. Apple first tasted Leong's culinary offerings, he aptly described them as "Singapore on





a plate, or rather several plates, brought up to date: traditions blended without strain”.

It takes an individual with a strong sense of self and yet an almost child-like fascination with the unfamiliar to chart out new gustatory territories the way Leong has. He is a chef who plays with his food for all the right reasons. “I play with caviar, foie gras and salmon,” says the son of the late shark’s fin master chef, Leong Mun Soon, who taught the teenaged Leong the secrets of traditional Chinese cookery back in the 1980s. “But I mix them with Chinese flavours. I know that guests essentially come to a Chinese restaurant to eat Chinese cuisine. That’s why I only use non-traditional ingredients like foie gras as a garnish, never as the focal point of a dish. It just makes it a little more interesting.”

The ever adventurous chef gets his culinary inspiration from trips to Europe and the United States, visiting chefs and their restaurants. It is through observing different surroundings, he says, that he gathers ideas and develops new creations. Even scouting for ingredients at produce markets with his chef buddies inspires him to create novel new dishes. Sometimes, however, it is the most local of ingredients that sets off flashes of gastronomic greatness. The durian is an odiferous tropical fruit with a spiky husk that is not allowed on public transport systems in Singapore because of its strong smell. It has the perfume of ripe cheese and bittersweet, creamy flesh—not quite the kind of fruit one would imagine placing on a Chinese menu. Leong cheekily incorporated it into a mayonnaise and served it with crispy prawns. Fans who have sampled it have been clamouring for more. Unfortunately, because the dish has such a pungent aroma, the chef cannot even serve it in his own restaurants! Leong’s first solo cookbook is entitled *A Wok Through Time*.







JULIENNED CHICKEN WITH YUNNAN HAM IN CHICKEN CONSOMMÉ

Serves 1

120g chicken breast
40g Yunnan ham, julienned
2 spinach leaves, poached
120ml chicken consommé
1/4tsp salt
1/4tsp sugar
1/4tsp Chinese cooking wine
Ground white pepper to taste

Steam chicken breast at 100 degrees Celsius for 8 minutes then cut into matchsticks. Place ham on chicken and steam at 100 degrees Celsius for 2 minutes. Arrange in the middle of a serving plate.

Heat oil in a wok. Add chicken consommé and spinach leaves. Bring to a boil and season with salt, sugar, Chinese cooking wine and pepper. Spoon over the ham and chicken just before serving.





PUMPKIN BROTH WITH CRABMEAT AND WALNUTS

Serves 1

1 Oriental pumpkin
(Oriental squash)
160ml chicken consommé
1Tbsp cooking oil
1/3tsp salt
1/3tsp sugar
1/2tsp sour cream
5g rosemary, minced (yields 1tsp)
5g thyme, minced (yields 1tsp)
Ground white pepper to taste
30g crabmeat, steamed
1tsp corn flour, mixed with 2tsp water

Walnuts and pink peppercorns for garnish



Steam pumpkin at 100 degrees Celsius for 15 minutes or until soft. Cut in half horizontally and remove the seeds. Reserve one half for serving.

Scrape out the flesh from the other pumpkin half. Blend in a food processor with the chicken consommé.

Heat oil in a wok. Add pumpkin puree and chicken consommé mixture. Bring to a boil and stir in salt, sugar, sour cream, rosemary, thyme and pepper.

Add crabmeat then thicken with corn flour mixture if necessary. Spoon broth into the reserved pumpkin half.

Garnish with walnuts and peppercorns just before serving.





DOUBLE-BOILED WINTER MELON CONSOMMÉ WITH SHARK'S FIN AND SEAFOOD

Serves 1

20g shark's fin
1 winter melon
(approximately 400g)
40g prawns, poached, shelled
and diced
40g fresh crabmeat, poached
40g scallops, diced
20g dried scallops
250ml chicken consommé
1/2tsp salt
Ground white pepper to taste
1tsp Chinese cooking wine

Wolfberries and finely minced Yunnan
ham for garnish

Prepare shark's fin. Steam for 4 hours then soak in cold water overnight. Steam shark's fin again in its soaking liquid for another 2 hours. Drain and set aside. Alternatively, pre-cooked or pre-steamed shark's fin can be purchased. Simply cover with hot water and drain before use.

Slice off cap of the winter melon. Remove and discard seeds. Fill with cold water and stand in a heatproof bowl large enough to hold the melon. Steam for 15 minutes at 100 degrees Celsius or until the melon is soft. Steam dried scallops at 100 degrees Celsius for 5 minutes or until tender then shred.

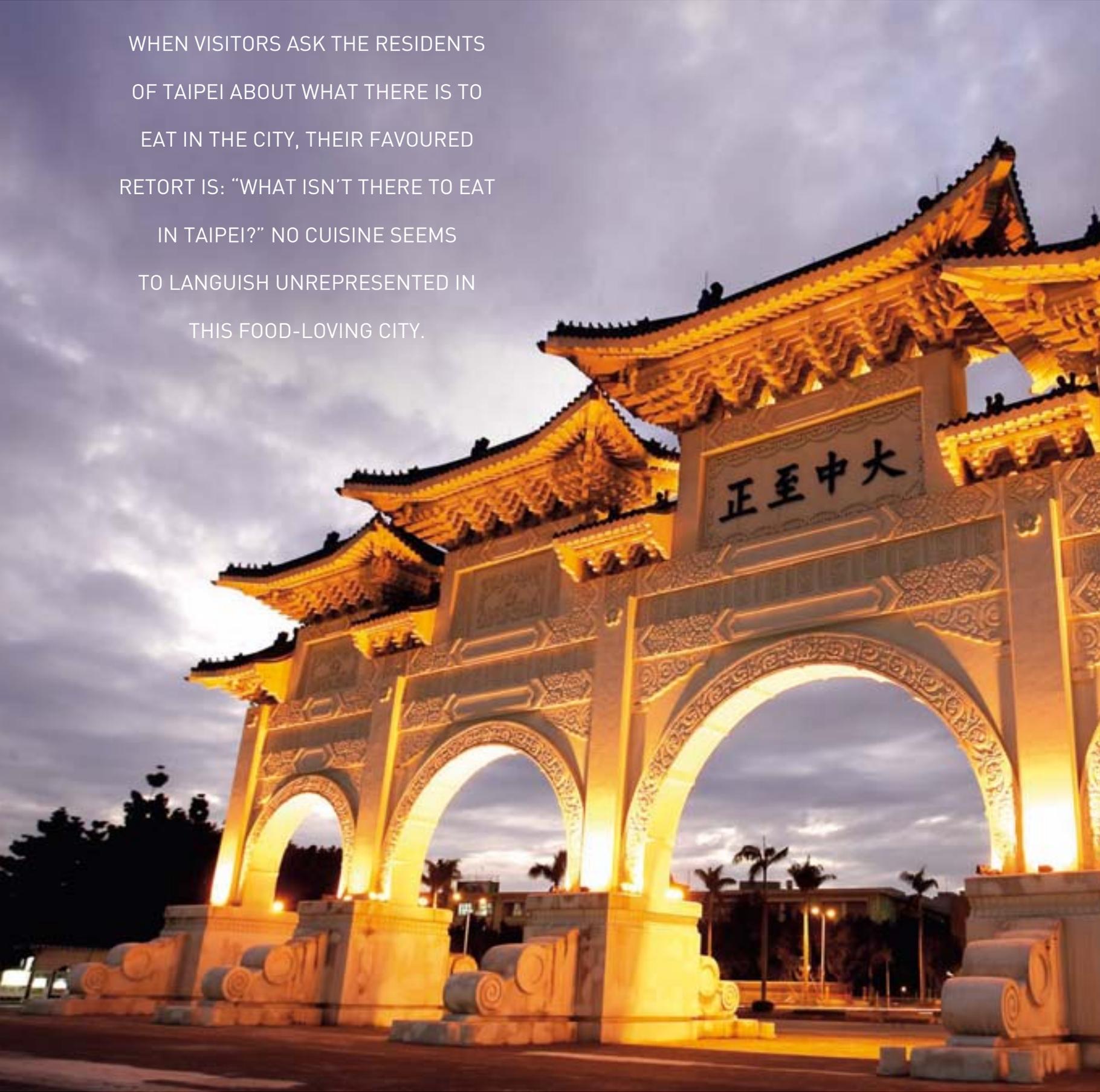
Place prawns, crabmeat, both fresh and dried scallops, and shark's fin in the melon. Set aside.

Heat oil in a wok. Add chicken consommé and season with salt, pepper and Chinese cooking wine to taste. Pour into the melon and steam for 10 minutes at 80 degrees Celsius.

Garnish with wolfberries and Yunnan ham.



WHEN VISITORS ASK THE RESIDENTS
OF TAIPEI ABOUT WHAT THERE IS TO
EAT IN THE CITY, THEIR FAVOURED
RETORT IS: “WHAT ISN’T THERE TO EAT
IN TAIPEI?” NO CUISINE SEEMS
TO LANGUISH UNREPRESENTED IN
THIS FOOD-LOVING CITY.









Taipei is one of those cities whose food defies definition. When asked about what there is to eat in Taipei, the favoured retort among locals is: “What isn’t there to eat in Taipei?” No cuisine seems to languish unrepresented in this food-loving city. Taiwanese cuisine is dominated by the culinary traditions of China’s Fujian province where many of its first immigrants came from. With them, they brought a rustic, hearty cuisine which focuses primarily on pork and vegetables (these are both plentiful and varied in Fujian), and places great value in simmered soups and stews. A classic, frequently enjoyed dish is congee, which is more commonly known in other parts of the world as Taiwanese porridge. The rice gruel is flavoured with different root vegetables (sweet potato is a favourite) and eaten with a delectable selection of side dishes such as omelette with pickled radishes, stir-fried fish with peanuts, beancurd and pickled vegetables.



However, over the years, subsequent waves of immigrants from mainland China have also introduced a little of the culinary secrets from their own hometowns to the city. Today, whether one is craving for Sichuan ma la huo guo (which literally means numbingly spicy hot pot) or a delicate Cantonese-style steamed fish, hundreds of top-notch, authentic versions of them can be found in Taipei.

The unique geography of Taiwan (only 20 per cent of its land is arable) has driven its people to rely primarily on seafood for their meals. Taipei’s fish markets are filled with a plentiful array of impressively fresh offerings. Everything from tuna and grouper to sardines and langoustines are laid out, glisteningly fresh off the trawlers. Taiwanese chefs have turned the preparation of seafood—whether served steamed, stewed, stir-fried, deep-fried or raw—into a fine art. At the same time, some of the finest fruit and









vegetables in the world come from here. Market stalls are laden with all manner of seasonal harvests; beautifully presented peaches, grapes, strawberries and melons are carefully packaged in individual cocoons to reflect their quality and value. Although the country has little land that can be cultivated, what little it has is considered some of the choicest farmland in East Asia. Taiwan straddles the Tropic of Cancer and has a hot, wet climate ideal for growing most things.

Taipei's traditional restaurants have clearly evolved from a Chinese culinary tradition. However, they are unique in their understated fusion of other gastronomic influences. The Japanese occupation of Taiwan between 1895 and 1945, for one, has left its indelible mark in the Taiwanese kitchen. As such, quintessentially Japanese dishes like sashimi and sushi have become part of the national diet. Today, sashimi is even available in Chinese restaurants in Taipei. Wasabi (Japanese horseradish) is also often served as a condiment, even in non-Japanese dining contexts. And miso (soy bean paste) has been enthusiastically incorporated into local dishes. The city has some of the most exquisite Japanese restaurants.

Taipei's famous street food is equally noteworthy. The city's night markets are the best places to sample a little of everything. Locals love working their way through the rabbit warren of stalls hawking steaming soup dumplings, deep-fried chicken, stinky tofu, noodle dishes, freshly fried oyster omelettes and deliciously sweet steamed corn. Called xiao chi (little bites), these snacks are designed to punctuate a languorous shopping spree rather than serve as a proper meal. Each one reflects a little of Taiwan's colourful culinary heritage.







STEAM

I LOVE STEAMING BECAUSE IT IS SUCH A NATURAL COOKING TECHNIQUE. USING A PURPOSE-BUILT STEAMER MAKES IT DOUBLY EASY. IT'S LIKE INJECTING CONTROLLED BREATHS OF HOT MOISTURE INTO YOUR PRODUCE TO COAX THEM INTO AN IDEAL STATE OF DONENESS. AT THE SAME TIME, YOU'RE RETAINING ALL ITS LOVELY NATURAL JUICES AND FLAVOURS. THERE'S NO NEED FOR OIL. ANYTHING ELSE, SAVE FOR A LITTLE SEA SALT TO ACCENTUATE THE TASTES THAT ARE ALREADY THERE, WOULD BE SUPERFLUOUS.

JUSTIN QUEK

Justin Quek trained in the kitchens of some of the world's greatest establishments including Clos Longchamp at the Meridien Etoile in Paris, Roland Mazere's Le Centenaire in Perigord, Jean Bardet in Tours, L'Oasis in Cote d'Azur and Hotel de Crillon, also in Paris. Across the English Channel, he spent some time with Michel Roux Junior at the Roux brothers' famed Le Gavroche and Waterside Inn. However, what differentiates him from his European counterparts are his Asian palate as well as his intimate understanding of Asian culinary traditions and ingredients. Quek has made a name for himself as one of Asia's foremost interpreters of French cuisine and is now chef-owner of La Petite Cuisine, one of Taipei's top French restaurants.

Singapore-born Quek was inspired to make Taipei his base when he discovered Taiwan's diverse and stunningly fresh produce. "In Singapore," he says, "a lot of the ingredients I worked with had to be imported. In Taipei, on the other hand, I get to take my pick from the very best of the Pacific Ocean's bounty, harvested daily from the waters off Taiwan. The country's delicious pork, seasonal fruit and vegetables are also absolutely inspiring. The ingredients might not be the same, but I feel like I'm working in Europe because I get to change my menus with the seasons. Being able to be creative and feature unusual items at different points in the year, when they are at their very best, makes food even more exciting."

Above all, Quek believes that a good chef should desire to serve his diners only the very best produce he can possibly find. To be able to achieve this, he has spent most of his professional life searching for the world's





finest artisanal food producers (often the same ones that make deliveries to Michelin-starred restaurants in Europe). Whether it is truffles and foie gras or champagne and caviar he is after, the world's best are often only a telephone call away for this passionate chef. Even in Taiwan, he has gone out of his way to meet with top-grade peach growers, dedicated farmers that rear the country's famous black pigs, and even families of fishermen who often bring him the freshest and most unusual catches of the day.

Quek's style of French cooking is modern. He prefers to accentuate it with fresh herbs and olive oil rather than cream and butter. And his subtle inclusion of Taiwanese ingredients such as mullet roe and fresh summer bamboo shoots hint at a culinary approach that is not wholly French. Yet, in terms of execution, presentation and overarching philosophy he keeps well to the French roots of his training. "My style is very light," Quek explains. "It is French-based but with some variations."

While he may play with the flavours of his favourite Singapore laksa (a noodle dish with a spicy, coconut milk-based broth) in a sauce, he introduces its distinctive top notes using tarragon rather than the traditional laksa leaf. Similarly, Quek takes a rustic street food like bak kut teh (a herbal pork-based soup) and imbues it with elegance, refinement and gastronomic sophistication. At times, he is best described as a culinary ambassador who injects Asian touches into a French framework (one of his signature canapés is a fish tempura served with curry salt). For both Asian and European diners the experience is one that simultaneously offers hints of the familiar interleaved with moments of exoticism. Quek is currently working on his first cookbook.







STEAMED OCEAN THREADFIN WITH GINGER AND SPRING ONIONS

Serves 2

2 ocean threadfin fillets
Sea salt to taste
50ml sunflower oil
20g garlic, peeled and chopped
20g ginger, peeled and sliced
1 red chilli, sliced
20g spring onions, chopped into
2.5cm lengths
100ml chicken stock
20ml Chinese rice wine
2Tbsp soy sauce
1tsp sugar

For garnish
Coriander leaves
Spring onions, julienned
1 chilli, seeds removed and julienned

Clean fish and pat dry with paper towels. Season with a little salt.

To make sauce, fry garlic in sunflower oil until fragrant and golden brown.

Add the rest of the ingredients and bring to a boil. Simmer for 5 minutes.

Place fish into a steamer preheated to 85 degrees Celsius and cook for 8 to 10 minutes (this depends on the thickness of the fillets).

Transfer the fillets onto a plate and pour the sauce over them. Garnish with coriander, spring onions and chilli. Serve with steamed rice.





STEAMED SAN SU VEGETABLES WITH MINCED PRAWNS, MUSHROOMS AND BLACK BEANS

Serves 2



220g san su or baby bok choy
150ml cooking oil
20g shallots, peeled and chopped
20g garlic, peeled and chopped
50g dried prawns
25g preserved black beans
2 large fresh shitake mushrooms, diced
3 fresh champignon (button) mushrooms, diced
250g prawns, shelled and minced
50ml chicken stock
2Tbsp soy sauce
1tsp sugar
Sea salt to taste

Trim and wash vegetables. Cook in preheated steamer for 5 minutes at 85 degrees Celsius.

While the vegetables are steaming, heat the oil in a wok. Fry shallots, garlic, dried prawns and black beans until fragrant. Add both kinds of mushrooms and cook for 5 minutes.

Next, add minced prawns, chicken stock, soy sauce and sugar. Season to taste. Once it boils, remove from the fire and set aside.

Remove vegetables from steamer. Drain and plate. Pour shrimp sauce over the vegetables and serve immediately.





STEAMED TOFU WITH MINCED PORK AND SALTED EGG SAUCE

Serves 2

100g minced pork
1 king oyster mushroom
50ml sunflower oil
2 pieces tofu
Salt and pepper to taste

Salted egg sauce
100ml chicken stock
Pinch of sugar
1tsp soy sauce
30g asparagus, diced
10g corn flour
20ml water
1/2 hardboiled salted duck egg,
chopped

Marinate the minced pork with salt and pepper. Set aside for 30 minutes.

Preheat convection oven to 200 degrees Celsius. Slice king oyster mushroom with a mandoline. Season with salt and some sunflower oil. Bake in the oven for 5 minutes. Remove and keep warm.

Cut tofu into bite-size pieces. Place some minced pork mixture on each piece of tofu. Steam at 100 degrees Celsius for 5 minutes.

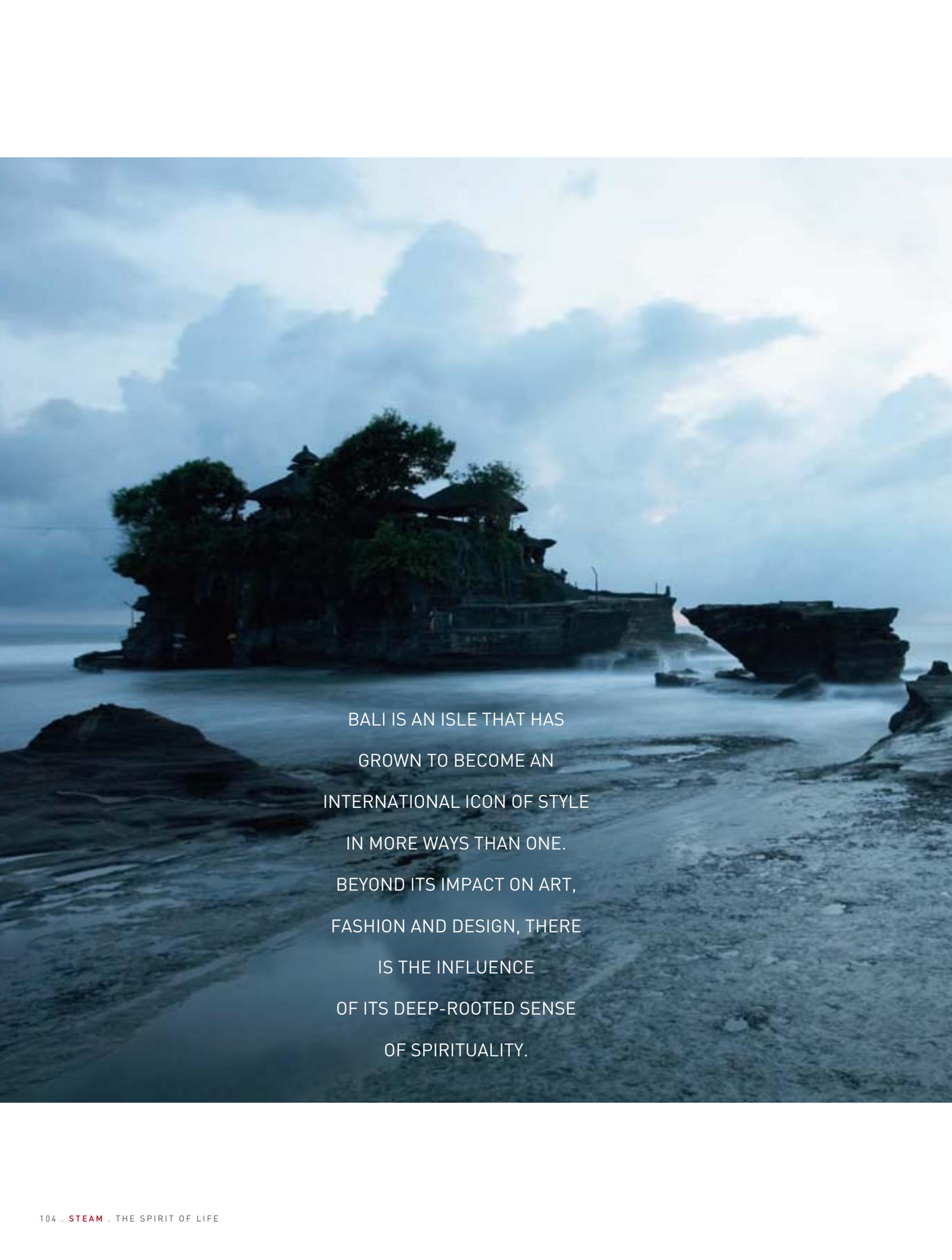
To make sauce, heat up chicken stock. Add sugar and soy sauce then bring to a boil. Add diced asparagus. Thicken with corn flour and water mixture. Finally, add chopped salted egg.

To serve, line the plate with a bed of mushrooms. Place the tofu on it and cover with sauce.

Chef's note:

Salted duck eggs can be replaced with salted anchovies.





BALI IS AN ISLE THAT HAS
GROWN TO BECOME AN
INTERNATIONAL ICON OF STYLE
IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.
BEYOND ITS IMPACT ON ART,
FASHION AND DESIGN, THERE
IS THE INFLUENCE
OF ITS DEEP-ROOTED SENSE
OF SPIRITUALITY.







Indonesia is a country of beautiful variety. In terms of its agriculture, culture, religion, language and exposure to the outside world, this expansive nation—one of the world's most populated—is diverse. At various points of its history, its interactions with India, Arab traders and intellectuals, Chinese merchants and immigrants, the Portuguese and the Dutch have all left their marks on the Indonesia of today. And the effect of these relations has by no means been homogenous. Thus, when contemplating the food of Indonesia one really needs to bear in mind the rich multiplicity of this nation. Rather than try to pare its differences down to a uniform, single essence, we need to look at it as a gustatory spread of multiple regional cuisines.

The mere mention of the island of Bali, more so than any other in Indonesia, sparks instant recognition. It is an isle that has grown to become an international icon of style in more ways than one. Beyond its impact on art, fashion and design, there is the influence of its deep-rooted sense of spirituality. Be it the Bali of our imagination or reality, both represent a lifestyle—a way of living and a way of looking at life—that have inspired many.

Its influence in the kitchen has been no less remarkable. Whether your preference is for breezy, open-sided warungs, sophisticated five-star hotel establishments or something in-between, you will find it ingeniously and intricately presented in this lush, tropical getaway. Yet, authentic Balinese food can be difficult to find. In truth, Balinese daily meals are simple and consist of rice, vegetables, a small amount of meat or fish (which they refer to as lauk) and a range of condiments including sambal which consists of fiery hot chillies ground with dried shrimp paste and other seasonings such as lime juice. Spices are often added to create a complexity in flavour while coconut









milk adds richness and a creamy texture. Herbs and aromatic roots contribute yet another overlay of subtle tastes.

In contrast, festival foods are elaborate and often presented in a highly decorative manner. These foods are prepared and enjoyed communally in celebration of a special occasion. The wider Indonesian population is predominantly Muslim and pork is therefore usually not served. In this context, Bali (like Irian Jaya and the highlands of North Sumatra and North Sulawesi) stands out for having pork dishes listed among its regional specialities. Babi guling (a spit-roasted whole suckling pig), is a festival favourite which is not to be missed. Bebek betutu is another Balinese classic. It involves stuffing a duck with cassava leaves and marinating it with a blend of herbs and spices before wrapping it in multiple layers of banana leaves as well as the outer part of coconut flowers (seludang mayang). The parcel is then cooked over a low heat for a long period of time. When done, the duck flesh is enticingly tender and flavourful.

Balinese skewered meat, called sate pentul is best savoured on holy days when the paths leading to the major temples where religious ceremonies are held are lined with street stalls hawking a selection of sate made with minced pork or various other meats flavoured with freshly grated coconut, prawn paste, garlic, chilli and kaffir lime leaves. The ingredients are combined into a dough-like mixture and wrapped around bamboo or sugarcane skewers. These are grilled over a charcoal fire and served with a sauce. Other scrumptious street-side treats include bakmie (noodle soup), lumpia (fried spring rolls filled with meat and vegetables), bakso (meatball soup), lawar (minced pork flavoured with coconut and spices) and bubuh injin, a warm dessert made of black glutinous rice and served in a sweet sauce of palm sugar and thick coconut cream.





STEAM

A LOT OF FOOD IN THE INDONESIAN KITCHEN IS STEAMED. WHETHER IT IS MEAT, RICE OR EVEN CAKES, STEAMING IS PREFERRED FOR ITS SIMPLICITY AND HEALTHFUL BENEFITS. TRADITIONALLY, WE WRAP OUR INGREDIENTS IN BANANA LEAVES BEFORE STEAMING THEM. THE LEAVES ACT AS A PRESERVATIVE. AT THE SAME TIME, THEY ADD A DELICATE FLAVOUR TO THE DISH. ALTHOUGH STEAMING LOOKS LIKE A SIMPLE TECHNIQUE, DON'T TAKE IT FOR GRANTED. SOME THINGS HAVE TO BE STEAMED FOR A LONG TIME; OTHERS ONLY HAVE TO BE STEAMED FOR A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME. TAKE THE TIME TO EXPERIMENT. **WILLIAM WONGSO**

William Wongso is a highly recognized and respected name both at home and abroad. The culinary educator and entrepreneur has been described as the Paul Bocuse of Indonesia and is credited with having educated the Indonesian palate since the Sixties. While he owns a string of eateries and bakeries in Jakarta, and is president of William F & B Management, it is the exclusive, reservations-only William Kafe Artistik where he showcases French-influenced fine dining creations which he has become closely associated with and much adulated for.

Wongso says that as a young boy growing up in East Java, he had always found food very interesting. However, he made his way into the professional kitchen by way of a very circuitous route. "I have done a little of everything," he says with a laugh. "I've worked in everything from an advertising agency to a travel agency. When I was young, I wanted to be a doctor!" It was his in-laws' suggestion that he move to Jakarta to start a bakery business that catalysed his culinary career.

"In order to better understand the business, I trained in Europe," Wongso reveals. "But my approach to learning was, and still is, all about taste. Before the start of any course I took, I would arrive ahead of time and get my research done. I would find out who the best bakers were and make it a point to taste samples of their breads. I learned to differentiate between artisanal and industrial breads by taste. So, by the time classes started, I already understood the flavour, texture, colour and smell of what I was learning about."

What first started out as business trips to study bread and pastry-making quickly became regular jaunts which Wongso spent searching for other exceptional taste experiences—be they xiao long bao (soup dumplings) in Shanghai or confit



de canard (preserved duck) at a three Michelin-starred restaurants in Paris. "It was an unplanned discovery," the gourmet insists. "Food is so unique. It is difficult to understand what food is until you taste it. Even though you can't replicate the exact same dish, tasting it consciously without taking it for granted helps you understand its colours and textures. Tasting gives you exposure.

"Cooking is not just about following a recipe. It is a combination of art, eye and feeling. Being able to taste a dish helps you create your own interpretation of it." In this way, Wongso has not only acquired a rich understanding of the world's cuisines (an in-depth knowledge said to be unparalleled in his country), but mastered a diverse set of culinary techniques. "In a way," he points out, "I interpret other people's cooking. I taste their food and cook it my way."

Yet, he is careful to make it clear that what he does should not be confused with fusion cuisine. "When I cook a Chinese-style dish, I don't incorporate Indonesian flavours. I keep within my own Chinese culinary framework." Although Wongso has never been formally trained as a chef, he works very closely with his staff in the kitchen. "I train them from scratch," he says. "We understand one another so well that even over the mobile phone, I can cook. I simply have to tell my staff what to do and when I get to the office, I can taste the finished product!"

Wongso maintains that a life spent "tasting widely" arms one with one of the best skills in the kitchen. But we must not forget the visionary creativity, passion and utter openness to the new and unfamiliar which he, too, brings into the kitchen. These qualities, in addition to a dedication to taste, are what truly set culinary superstars apart.







STEAMED COD WITH NUSANTARA SAUCE

Serves 6

1kg cod fillet
10g lime
Salt and pepper to taste
200ml fish or chicken stock
300ml coconut milk or fresh cream

Spice paste
150g large red chillies, seeds removed
50g shallots, peeled
50g garlic, peeled
50g candlenuts
1/2tsp turmeric powder
Salt and pepper to taste



Cut the fish fillet into 150g portions.
Season with salt, pepper and lime juice. Set aside.

To make the spice paste, pound the chillies, shallots, garlic, candlenuts and turmeric into a fine paste with a mortar and pestle, or use a food processor. If using a food processor, add a little water to the mixture to help make the blending easier. Add salt and pepper then sauté the paste over medium heat in order to retain the fresh colour of the paste.

Add the fish or chicken stock and simmer for 30 minutes. Strain then add coconut milk or fresh cream to create a sauce.

Steam the fish at 85 degrees Celsius for 10 minutes before pouring the sauce over it. This dish can be garnished with diced tomato and sweet basil, and served with yellow rice.





GADON DAGING (CENTRAL JAVANESE SPICED BEEF)

Makes 10 parcels

30g red chillies, seeds removed
30g green chillies, seeds removed
50g shallots, peeled
30g garlic, peeled
300g minced beef
Salt and pepper to taste
1/4tsp cumin, roasted and ground
1/4tsp coriander seeds, roasted and ground
100ml coconut milk
3 to 4 bay leaves
1 stalk lemongrass, bruised
100g tofu, minced
1 egg
200g banana leaves or iceberg lettuce



Finely slice the chillies and shallots. Mince the garlic. Mix them into the beef. Add salt, pepper, ground cumin and ground coriander.

Bring the coconut milk to a boil. Add the bay leaves and lemongrass then simmer for 15 minutes. Allow to cool before straining. Add to the beef mixture and mix well.

Stir tofu into the beef mixture. Add the egg and mix until well combined.

If using banana leaves, cut leaves into 15cm squares. If using lettuce, separate leaves then blanch and refresh in ice water before using.

Wrap 50g of the filling in each leaf.

If necessary, trim off excess banana leaf. Steam at 100 degrees Celsius for 5 minutes.

If using lettuce leaves, serve with tomato sauce.

Chef's note:

Banana leaves are not edible.





GARANG ASEM AYAM KAMPONG (STEAMED FREE RANGE CHICKEN WITH HERBS AND SOUR CARAMBOLA)

Serves 6

- 1 free range chicken (around 1.5kg)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 50g large red chillies
- 50g large green chillies
- 300g sour carambola (small, sour starfruit) or to taste
- 100g garlic, peeled and sliced
- 75g shallots, peeled and sliced
- 3 to 5 bay leaves
- 75g greater galangal (lengkuas or blue ginger), peeled and sliced
- 400 to 500ml thick coconut milk
- 1 to 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 3 bunches banana leaves (optional)

Chop the chicken into 12 to 16 pieces. Marinate with salt and pepper. Set aside.

Deseed chillies and slice each lengthwise into four pieces. Slice sour carambola crosswise to 5mm thickness. The tart flavour of sour carambola can be substituted with lemon juice, but only add the lemon juice after the chicken has been cooked or just before serving if you are using it.

Mix the chicken with the chillies, sour carambola, garlic, shallots, bay leaves and greater galangal. Add the coconut

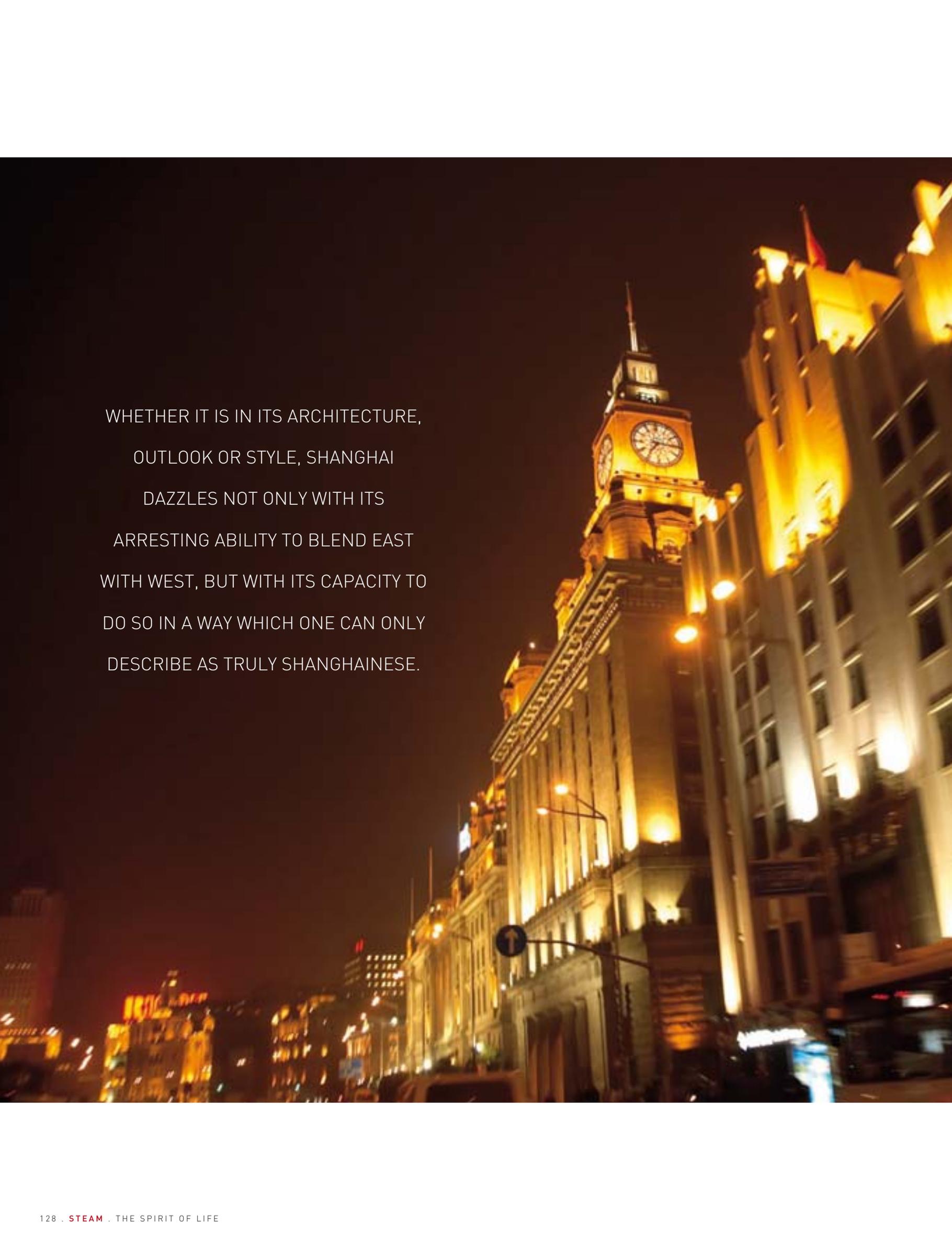
milk and eggs. Mix well.

Wrap two to three pieces of chicken (together with some of the mixture it is in) in each banana leaf. Ensure that each pouch contains some bay leaf, a slice of greater galangal and some chilli. If banana leaves are not available, place all the ingredients in a heatproof bowl and cover with cling wrap. Poke a few holes in the cling wrap with a small knife.

Steam at 100 degrees Celsius for 30 minutes and serve warm.

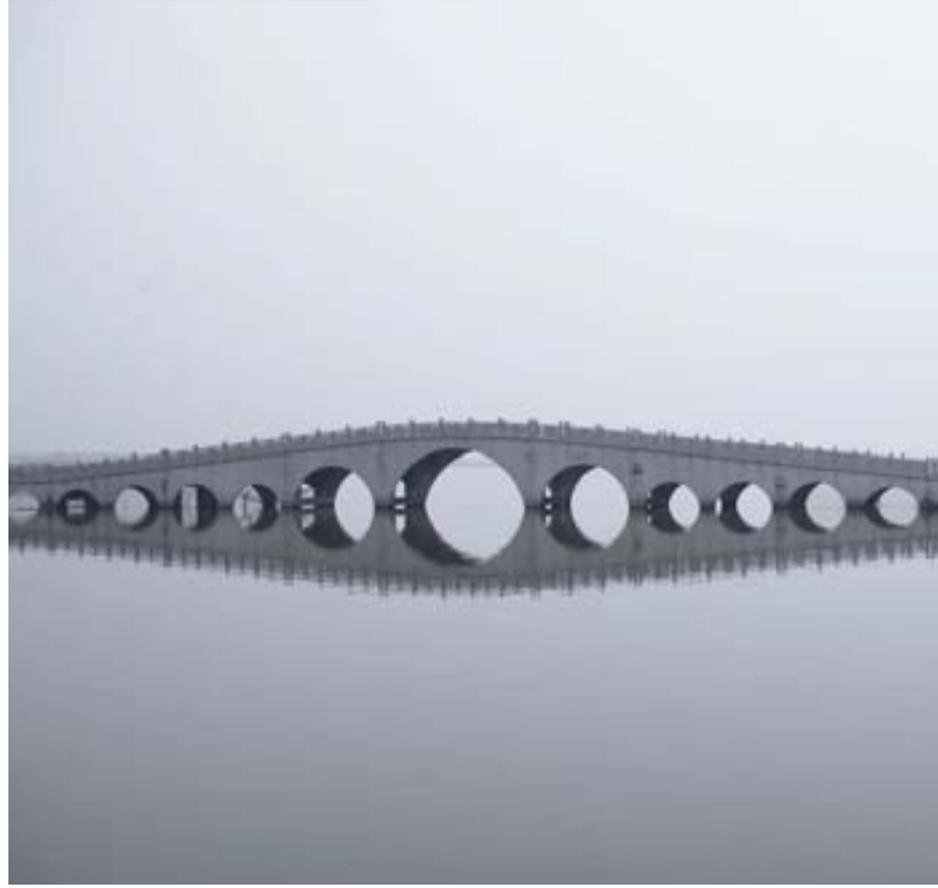


SHANGHAI

A nighttime photograph of the Bund in Shanghai, China. The image shows a row of grand, classical-style buildings illuminated with warm yellow lights. The most prominent feature is the clock tower of the Bund, which is brightly lit and stands out against the dark sky. The street in the foreground is dark, with some blurred lights from vehicles and street lamps. The overall atmosphere is one of a vibrant, historic city at night.

WHETHER IT IS IN ITS ARCHITECTURE,
OUTLOOK OR STYLE, SHANGHAI
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The cultural depth and history of China's capital city, Beijing might be breathtaking, but it is the throbbing energy of Shanghai that high-flying jet setters continue to find irresistible, visit after visit. Shanghai, once considered the Paris of the East, is exotic and urbane; at once quintessentially Chinese, yet idiosyncratically European. In the larger scheme of things, Shanghai is considered a young city. Until the British arrived in the 1830s, Shanghai was a tiny, walled town barely five-and-a-half kilometres in circumference. Yet, by 1870 it was the world's fifth largest port and by the 1930s the city was on par with the largest metropolises in the world. Whether it is in its architecture, outlook or style, Shanghai dazzles not only with its arresting ability to blend east with west, but with its capacity to do so in a way which one can only describe as truly Shanghainese.



These days, China's largest metropolis is one of the fastest changing in Asia. A walk down Shanghai's historic Bund affirms the oft repeated claim that it has a diversity of architectural offerings unrivalled by any city in the world. Neoclassical, Renaissance, Art Deco and contemporary buildings are strikingly juxtaposed, testament to the city's rich history. And into the new millennium, Shanghai has continued to reinvent its architectural presence—further proof of its people's seemingly never-ending desire to innovate. These stunning, iconic buildings have been given a new lease of life and now boast chic restaurants headlined by Michelin-starred chefs, world-class bars and slick boutiques. In its present incarnation, this landmark stretch lining the Huangpu River is a microcosm of all that is so alluring about hip, yet historical, Shanghai.

On the gustatory front, Shanghai has also begun to cover new ground. However, to truly understand it, one must realise









that this openness to culinary adoption and adaptation has long been part of the very soul of Shanghai. The food of this city is considered the most eclectic of China's cuisines. It incorporates dishes and ingredients not only from all over the country, but also from the west. For example, the lavish selection of cold starters served at the beginning of Shanghainese banquets—and usually flavoured with soy sauce and sugar—are said to share some commonalities with the Russian zakuska tradition.

Shanghainese cuisine bears a marked preference for vinegar, sugar, sweet bean paste and rice ale. And due to its location in the eastern, Lower Yangtze region of China where land and water meet, the metropolis shares with its neighbours, a cuisine that has elevated the preparation of crabs, fresh water prawns, seaweed and water plants to a high art. The green crabs from the area around Shanghai are said to be the best in the world. The city's renowned drunken crabs—a cold dish of hairy crabs marinated in soy sauce, sugar and vinegar, and served raw (a rarity in Chinese cuisine)—is the classic introduction to its hallmark flavours. The Shanghainese are so enamoured of their da zha xie (hairy crabs) that between the months of September and December each year, their dinner tables are filled with all manner of hairy crab dishes. Some restaurants even specialise in creating elaborate, multi-course xie yan (crab feasts).

In the early Twenties, Shanghai was also renowned for its opulent 'eating palaces', restaurants decked out in imperial splendour which played host to the world's elite. Today, the Shanghainese seem to be picking up where their savvy predecessors left off. Dining in Shanghai has become an exhilarating experience which offers an endless choice of spectacular gastronomic opportunities.





STEAM

STEAMING REDUCES THE NEED FOR SEASONINGS. THE APPROACH TO ADDING SEASONINGS IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE COOKING IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF EUROPEAN COOKING. IN THE CHINESE KITCHEN, THE AMOUNT OF SEASONING USED DEPENDS ON THE CHEF'S INSTINCT. IN THE EUROPEAN KITCHEN, THIS STEP IS MORE PRECISE. AT TIMES, A CHEF'S INSTINCT IN THE KITCHEN MAY NOT BE RELIABLE, EVEN AMONG THE MOST EXPERIENCED CHEFS. THUS, IN THE CHINESE KITCHEN IT IS NOT UNUSUAL FOR A DISH TO TURN OUT TASTING A LITTLE TOO HEAVY OR TOO LIGHT. UTILISING STEAM IN THE COOKING PROCESS HELPS TO ENSURE THAT DISHES TASTE GREAT EVEN WITHOUT THE EXCESSIVE ADDITION OF SEASONINGS BECAUSE THE NATURAL FLAVOURS OF THE INGREDIENTS ARE RETAINED.

SU DE-XING

Su De-Xing was first inspired to become a chef because he wanted to acquire a skill that would not become outmoded. To him, there will always be a need for chefs. “People will always need to eat,” he says. “And within Chinese culture, great attention is placed upon our diet. Therefore, chefs will always have a place in Chinese society.”

Su came to this conclusion at the tender age of 18 when he embarked on his career. “My basic training was very difficult,” the chef admits. “Chinese cooking requires skilful handling of the wok and knife. I was not strong enough when I first started. I had to learn to handle a wok filled with sand while my master added water to the sand to make it heavier and more difficult to toss. My arm grew swollen after just two days of this and the swelling seemed to last forever. You can still see the scars on my hand today.”

According to Su, to become a chef—let alone excel as one—an individual has to be willing to take the physical punishment of endless practice. “If you cannot endure the hardship, you will never pass the very first tests,” he reveals with sage-like gravity. However, beyond that resilience, the true sign of a chef’s abilities and depth of experience lies in his or her ability to handle a knife.

In his opinion, the successful preparation of a large proportion of food is ultimately based upon the use of the knife. “Using a knife to prepare food directly impacts the finished outcome,” Su insists. “If ingredients are not cut into the proper size, the dish will not only look bad, it will also cook unevenly. A good chef ought to know how his raw material should be prepared.”

Although he is Shanghainese, Su is trained in Cantonese cuisine. “I like Cantonese cuisine the most,” he confesses.



上海

“Seasonings tend to be light and they bring out the original flavour of the food. Dishes are low in salt, sugar and fat, and high in protein. In my opinion, it is a nice alternative to traditional Shanghainese food which is too heavy.”

If given the option, he prefers to prepare seafood in the Cantonese style because he feels that it enables him to retain the natural flavours of his produce. “I like non-farm cultivated produce,” the chef avers. “The farmed products just don’t taste the same. I also try to avoid canned food whenever possible. I like fresh, live seafood. They are the best. Especially when they are served steamed.”

In order to hold on to these natural flavours, Su uses little more than salt and pepper to season his food. He believes that the success of a dish resides in a chef’s cooking technique more than anything else. Nevertheless, he does add soy sauce and XO sauce to some dishes. “But, I never use them as they are,” the chef divulges. “Their flavours usually need to be tweaked and enhanced, just as I have indicated in my recipes for this book.”

Ultimately, for Su, it is achieving a balance between colour, aroma and taste in his dishes that truly gratifies him. “It always gives me great pleasure,” he says, “to be able to put the finishing touches to a dish and savour the moment when a guest pauses, reluctant to disturb the perfect presentation of the dish placed before him or her.”

More importantly, with so many years in the kitchen tucked under his belt, Su has come to realise that cooking is not a science. “You need to create and fine-tune your own dishes,” he advises home chefs. “Without creativity, you can only be a cook, not a chef.”







STEAMED MANDARIN FISH WITH JIN-HUA HAM

Serves 2 to 3

- 1 fresh Mandarin fish (gui-yu), approximately 500g
- 50g Jin-hua ham
- 6 to 8 dried shitake mushrooms, 2 to 3cm in diameter
- 50g ginger
- 1 bamboo shoot
- Salt to taste
- 3Tbsp cooking rice wine (huang-jiu or Shao-xing wine) or to taste
- 1 cucumber
- Soy sauce to taste

Prepare fish. Remove and retain the head and tail for decorative purposes. By slicing down the back of the fish, split the body of the fish lengthwise into two halves. Remove the bones.

Cut each of the fillets into two to three pieces, approximately 3 to 4cm in length. Down the full length of each piece, create a slit approximately 2cm deep.

Soak the mushrooms for 1 to 2 hours. Remove the stems.

Cut the ham into 2 by 4cm slices, 2 to 3mm thick.

Lightly dust the fish fillets with salt to taste, making sure that the slits are also well seasoned.

Cut the ginger into slices similar in size to the ham slices.

Cook bamboo shoot in boiling water for approximately 10 minutes and cut it into slices similar in size to the ham slices.

Insert a piece of ham, mushroom, ginger and bamboo shoot into the slit of each fish fillet. Arrange the fillets on a large heatproof plate.

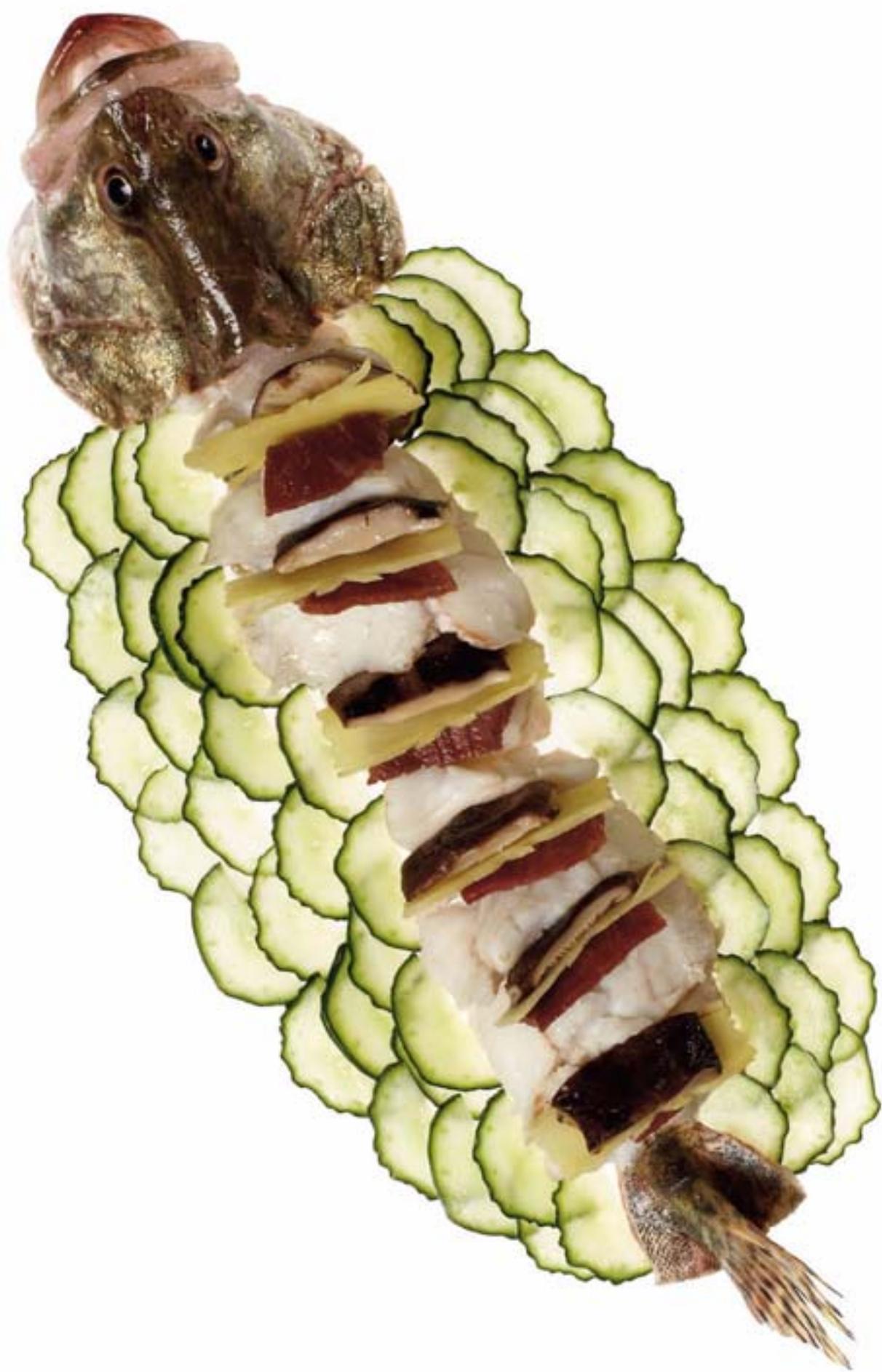
Season the fish with cooking wine. Place into the steamer and cook for 5 to 6 minutes at 80 degrees Celsius.

Halve the cucumber lengthwise then cut into thin slices.

Remove the fish from the steamer. Sprinkle it with soy sauce for additional flavor. Decorate the outer edge of the serving plate with the cucumber slices before serving.

Chef's note:

In order to preserve the original flavour of the fish, light seasoning is recommended. As an alternative to pure soy sauce, mix soy sauce with some sugar and dilute with water to taste.





STEAMED TOFU WITH MINCED CRABMEAT AND SHRIMP

Serves 2 to 3

200 to 300g tofu
100g hairy crab meat
100g shrimps
Salt and pepper to taste
20g fresh coriander leaves
1Tbsp soy sauce or to taste



Slice tofu into 2 by 3cm pieces, 1cm thick.

Peel and mince the shrimps. Mix the minced shrimps and hairy crab meat with salt and pepper. Shape into small balls of approximately 1cm in diameter. Place a ball on top of each piece of tofu.

Wash the coriander and remove the leaves. Place a leaf on each tofu slice, next to each ball.

Place the tofu slices onto a heatproof plate. Steam for 4 minutes at 95 degrees Celsius.

Sprinkle soy sauce over the tofu just before serving.

Chef's note:

In place of pure soy sauce, a blend of soy sauce and sugar diluted with water to taste may be used.





STEAMED SHITAKE MUSHROOM WITH MINCED SHRIMP BALL

Serves 2 to 3



8 to 10 dried shitake mushrooms, 3 to 4cm in diameter

150g fresh water shrimps

Salt and pepper to taste

1 egg white

15g Jin-hua ham

150g Shanghai greens
(baby bok choy)

1 carrot



Soak the mushrooms for 1 to 2 hours. Remove the stems. Place the mushrooms in a bowl. Cover with the original soaking liquid and steam at 80 degrees Celsius for 5 minutes. Remove the mushrooms and dry with a paper towel.

Peel and mince the shrimps. Add 2Tbsp of the egg white, plus salt and pepper to the shrimps to create a paste. Beat the paste for approximately 10 minutes or until mixing becomes laborious.

Fill each mushroom cap with the shrimp paste using a wet spoon. Place the mushrooms in a heatproof plate with the filling side facing upwards.

Finely chop the ham and sprinkle it over the shrimp paste.

Peel off the outer leaves of the Shanghai greens (baby bok choy), keeping only the hearts. Peel and cut the carrot into small sticks about 2cm in length. Insert a carrot stick into the stem of each baby bok choy.

Cook the vegetables in boiling water for 3 minutes. Rinse with cold water and drain.

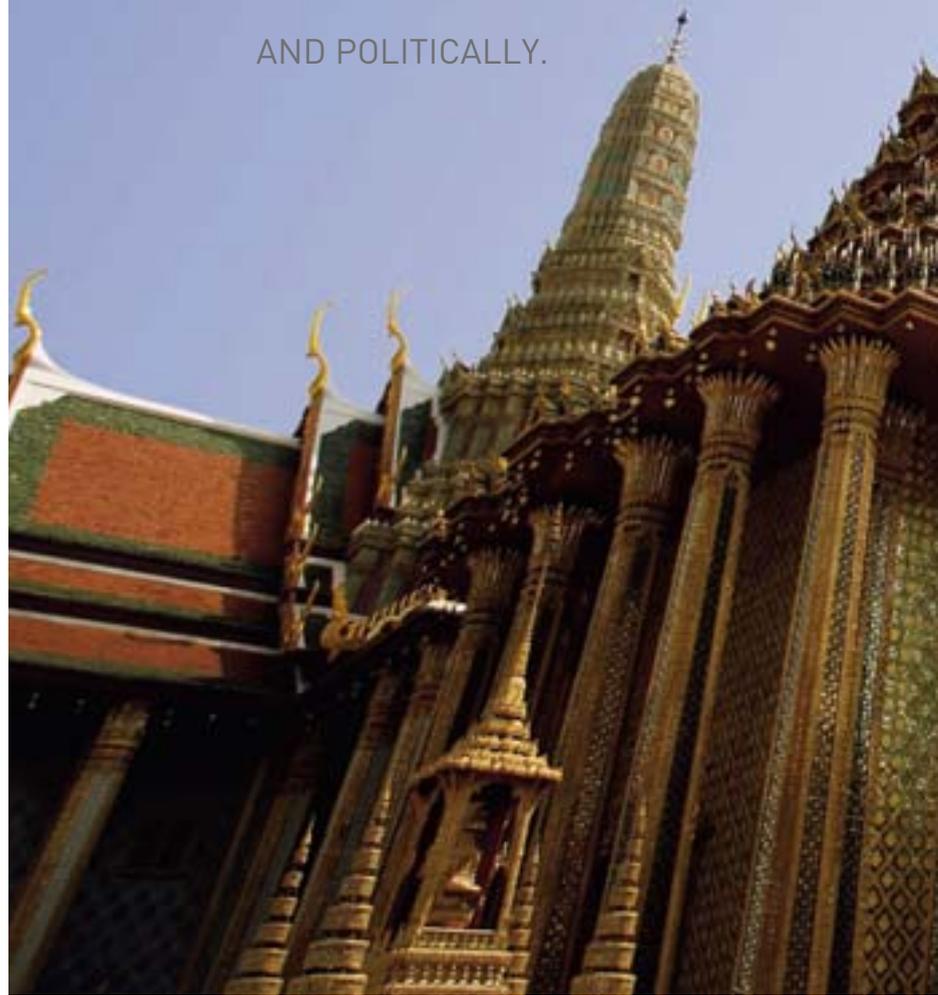
Place the mushroom caps into the steamer and cook for 5 minutes at 100 degrees Celsius.

Before serving, decorate the serving plate with the prepared vegetables, keeping the mushrooms in the middle. Serve warm.





IT IS BY NO ACCIDENT THAT THE FOOD OF BANGKOK IS POSSIBLY THE MOST COMPLEX IN THE COUNTRY. PERMANENT SETTLEMENT OCCURRED IN THIS REGION OVER 2,500 YEARS AGO. THE CENTRAL PLAINS OF THAILAND HAVE BECOME VERY MUCH THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY BOTH ECONOMICALLY AND POLITICALLY.









Although the fame of Thai cuisine has spread well beyond the borders of its homeland, what we have grown to recognise internationally as Thai food should probably be more accurately described as the food of Bangkok. It is most often lauded for its clean, fresh flavours blended with subtlety and sophistication; its high regard for fresh ingredients; its lightness and balance in matching taste, texture and appearance; and its healthfulness. Indeed, the Thai cuisine that we have grown familiar with has given us little cause for complaint. However, there is much more to this highly developed cuisine than the precious little we have been exposed to in most Thai restaurants outside of Thailand.

The regional cuisines of this nation are varied and distinct. In the north, in the area bordered by Burma and Laos, dishes are served with sticky, glutinous rice (khao niew). Curries are made without coconut milk (most dishes are moistened with water or stock) and there is a preference for pork, which is even enjoyed in spicy sausages called sai ua. In the south, seafood and fish dominate the dinner table. Shrimp paste is enthusiastically used, as are fiery dried bird's eye chillies. In this region, curries are richly flavoured with coconut milk and brightly coloured with turmeric. There is great culinary diversity in this Land of a Thousand Smiles.

Although there are restaurants and street stalls that serve the cuisines of the north, north-east (Isarn) and south in Bangkok, it is the food indigenous to central Thailand and the nation's capital itself which is most associated with the city. Freshwater fish, prawns and crabs, as well as chicken, pork and beef are most frequently featured on Bangkok menus. Curries (geng) span the now familiar categories of red, green and panaeng. They can be differentiated from those of the north and Muslim south by their reduced use of dried spices. It is also here, in the central plains, that the legendary tom yam soup is considered a staple.









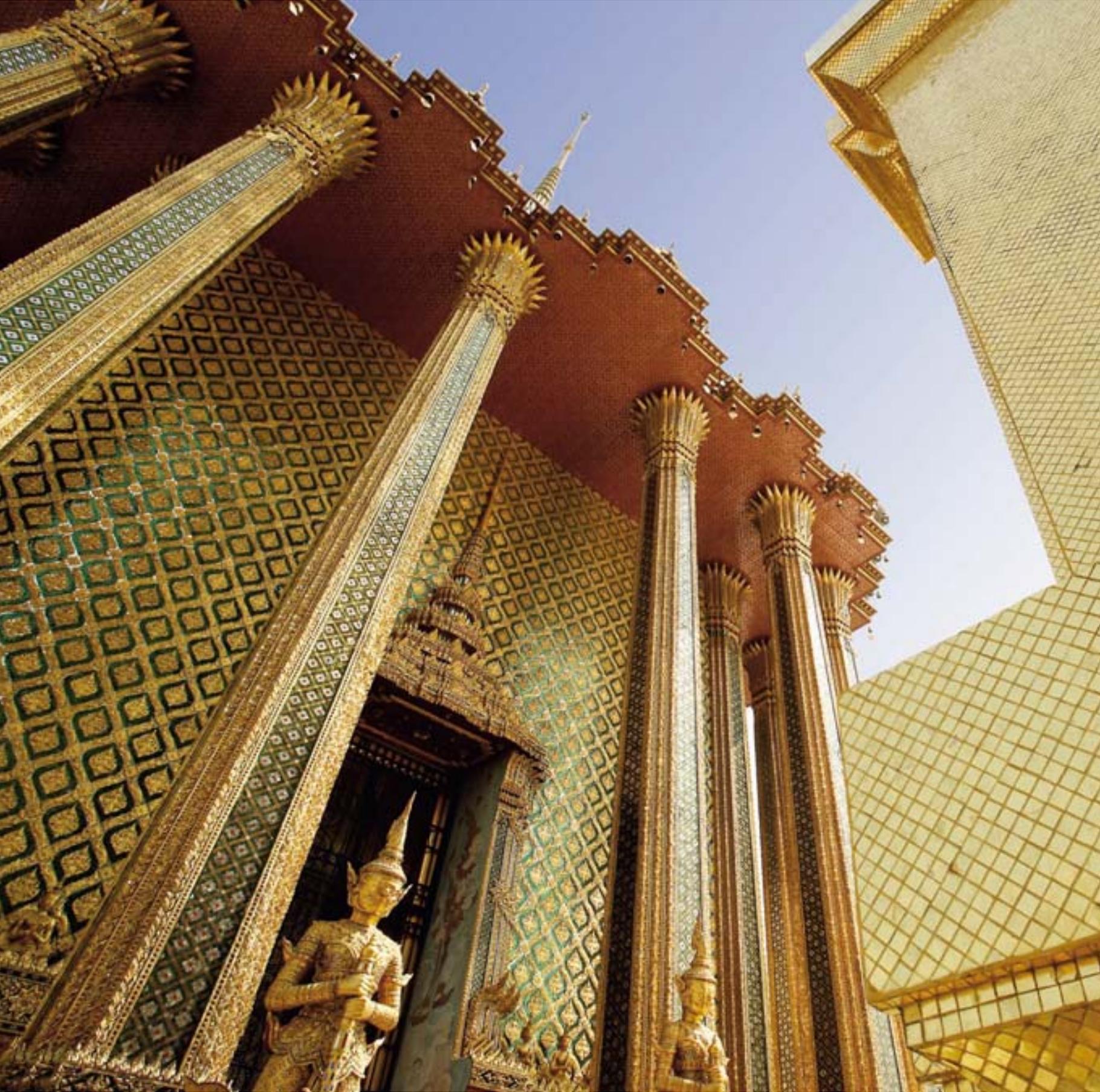
The style of Bangkok's food has been heavily influenced by the Chinese. A significant proportion of the city's population is ethnically Chinese (mostly due to large-scale immigration in the 19th and early 20th centuries). Present-day Bangkok-style cooking, both in the professional kitchen and at home, utilises numerous Chinese culinary techniques including stir-frying, deep-frying and steaming. You will also recognise the adoption of noodle dishes, as well as braises flavoured with classic Chinese spices such as star anise.

It is by no accident that the food of this region is possibly the most complex in the country. Permanent settlement occurred here over 2,500 years ago. The central plains of Thailand have become very much the heart of the country both economically and politically. It seems natural, then, that Bangkok is also home to Thai royal cuisine, a more sophisticated rendition of the classics of the region. Said to have been influenced by the kitchens of the royal court, the preparation of each dish is elaborate, making them works of art as well as culinary masterpieces.



In essence, to understand Thai cuisine, one must first focus on the balance between the classic quartet of flavours: hot, sour, salty and sweet. In Thailand, the heat of pepper and chilli is tempered with the tart flavours of sour fruits (like green mangoes), tamarind, lime juice, kaffir lime zest and vinegar. Nuanced, savoury accents are introduced using fish sauce, shrimp paste and fish paste; while sweetness is carefully introduced with the use of palm sugar—which has a beautiful depth and complexity of flavour. Occasionally, coconut milk is used to add richness and body. Equally important is the use of aromatic fresh herbs and leaves. The vibrant, grassy flavours of fresh coriander, lemongrass and Thai basil underscore the very basis of Thai cuisine. It is the careful interplay of these flavours that makes Thai cuisine so unique.





STEAM

STEAMING IS A COOKING TECHNIQUE USED THROUGHOUT THAILAND. APART FROM ITS HEALTH-GIVING PROPERTIES, THIS METHOD OF COOKING IS ALSO THE SECRET TO CREATING FORK-TENDER MEAT. THE MEAT IS FIRST CUT INTO LARGE PIECES AND PLACED IN A HEATPROOF CONTAINER BEFORE IT IS COVERED WITH STOCK OR SOME OTHER FLAVOURFUL LIQUID. THE CONTAINER IS THEN TIGHTLY SEALED AND PLACED IN A STEAMER FOR MANY HOURS. THE RESULTING DISH IS RICH IN NATURAL FLAVOURS AND MELTINGLY TENDER.

Chalida Thaochalee, who won the coveted crown of Miss Thailand in 1998, only started taking cooking seriously two years ago. Even so, the knowledge she has garnered in the kitchen has helped her pen a Thai bestseller entitled *Diet Secret: How To Eat To Be Thin*. She now hosts her own television programme called *Living In Shape*. The svelte celebrity says that even as a young child, she loved cooking. However, it was her desire to develop a way of eating that would help her maintain her weight which eventually drew the former beauty queen into the kitchen.

“I first started cooking for my husband,” the soft-spoken public figure reveals. “Then I graduated to entertaining; cooking for family and friends. Eventually, I even went to study nutrition in the United States.”

This multi-talented lady—she is a television presenter, columnist, actress and painter—believes in keeping to a diet which consists of food that complements her blood group. She also maintains a low carbohydrate intake and subscribes to the macrobiotic way of life. “I believe it is particularly important for everyone to eat right and exercise,” she expounds. “Taking good care of your health is probably the best investment you will ever make. I admit that it’s a challenge to convince people, even myself, to do so because we lead such busy lives. It is always a joy for me to discover new ways of attaining good health which I can share with my audience.”

While *Diet Secret* is a book that essentially offers readers advice on how to stay healthy and only features a few of Thaochalee’s recipes, her television show actually has a cooking segment, one that even has her travelling with her kitchen utensils so that she is able to put together a



dish onscreen just about anywhere. "Sometimes, a busy lifestyle keeps people away from cooking and spending time in the kitchen," she observes. "A lot of women who have jobs simply buy their meals. I try to make cooking fun."

According to Thaochalee, a large number of Thai women believe that they need to lose weight and put themselves on diets. Through her columns, books and television show she tries to educate them about their Body Mass Index (BMI). She believes that learning to calculate and eventually understand their own BMIs will help them establish what their bodies need. "Don't compare yourself with models and movie stars," she advises her female fans. "They have to ensure that they stay a certain size because of the demands of their jobs. Learn to eat the right foods and learn to prepare them yourself. Eat fresh and organic produce."

This much-adulated health guru is convinced that home cooked food is by far the best. She experiments in the kitchen and is often inspired by the food she has tasted on her trips abroad. Although she adores the cuisines of the Mediterranean, the flavours of Thailand remain her favourite. "Thai cuisine is rich with spices and flavour," the television star rhapsodises. "I love chillies. They add flavour as well as vibrant colour to food."

Yet, when it comes to Thaochalee's culinary philosophy, it is not the kind of cuisine you are preparing that matters most. For her, it is love. "Love what you do," she declares. "Take cooking and eating to be a way of sharing. Put your heart into your cooking since the only reason you cook is because you care."





GARLIC PRAWN PARCELS WITH LEMONGRASS

Makes 12 skewers

- 1 egg
- 50g carrot, peeled and sliced
- 5 dried shitake mushrooms, soaked in water and sliced
- 3 goat peppers or 2 red chillies, seeds removed and finely chopped
- 1Tbsp chopped garlic
- 1Tbsp chopped coriander root
- 1Tbsp freshly ground pepper
- 2Tbsp oyster sauce
- 1Tbsp soy sauce
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2tsp chicken stock powder
- 2 to 3Tbsp corn flour
- 300g prawns, shelled and minced
- 300g pork, minced
- 12 stalks lemongrass, trimmed and washed

Blend all the ingredients, except the final four, in a food processor. In a bowl, combine the processed mix with the prawns and pork. Add 2 to 3Tbsp corn flour to create a sticky mixture.

Divide the mixture into 12 portions and shape each one around the base of a lemongrass stalk. Steam at 100 degrees Celsius for 12 minutes.

This can be served with couscous and garnished with vegetables.





PUMPKIN CUSTARD

Makes 600ml

360g pumpkin, peeled and sliced
1 egg yolk
130g sugar
2Tbsp plain flour
112ml fresh milk
50g light brown sugar
112ml coconut milk
1/2tsp salt

Steam the pumpkin slices at 100 degrees Celsius for 15 minutes. Puree until smooth.

Mix the sugar into the egg yolk. Stir the flour into the fresh milk. Next, stir both mixtures into the pumpkin puree.

Stir the light brown sugar and coconut milk into the pumpkin mixture. Add the salt. Place the mixture in a tray and cover with two layers of cling wrap. Poke a few holes in the cling wrap with a small knife. Steam for 10 minutes at 90 degrees Celsius.

Serve with wholegrain bread.





STEAMED EGGS

Serves 4

2 to 3 fresh shitake mushrooms, diced
20g carrot, peeled and julienned
20g broccoli florets
3 eggs
112ml water
1Tbsp soy sauce
Pepper to taste
1Tbsp tapioca flour

Kaiware (daikon shoots) and fried garlic for garnish

Steam shitake mushrooms, carrots and broccoli for 3 minutes at 100 degrees Celsius.

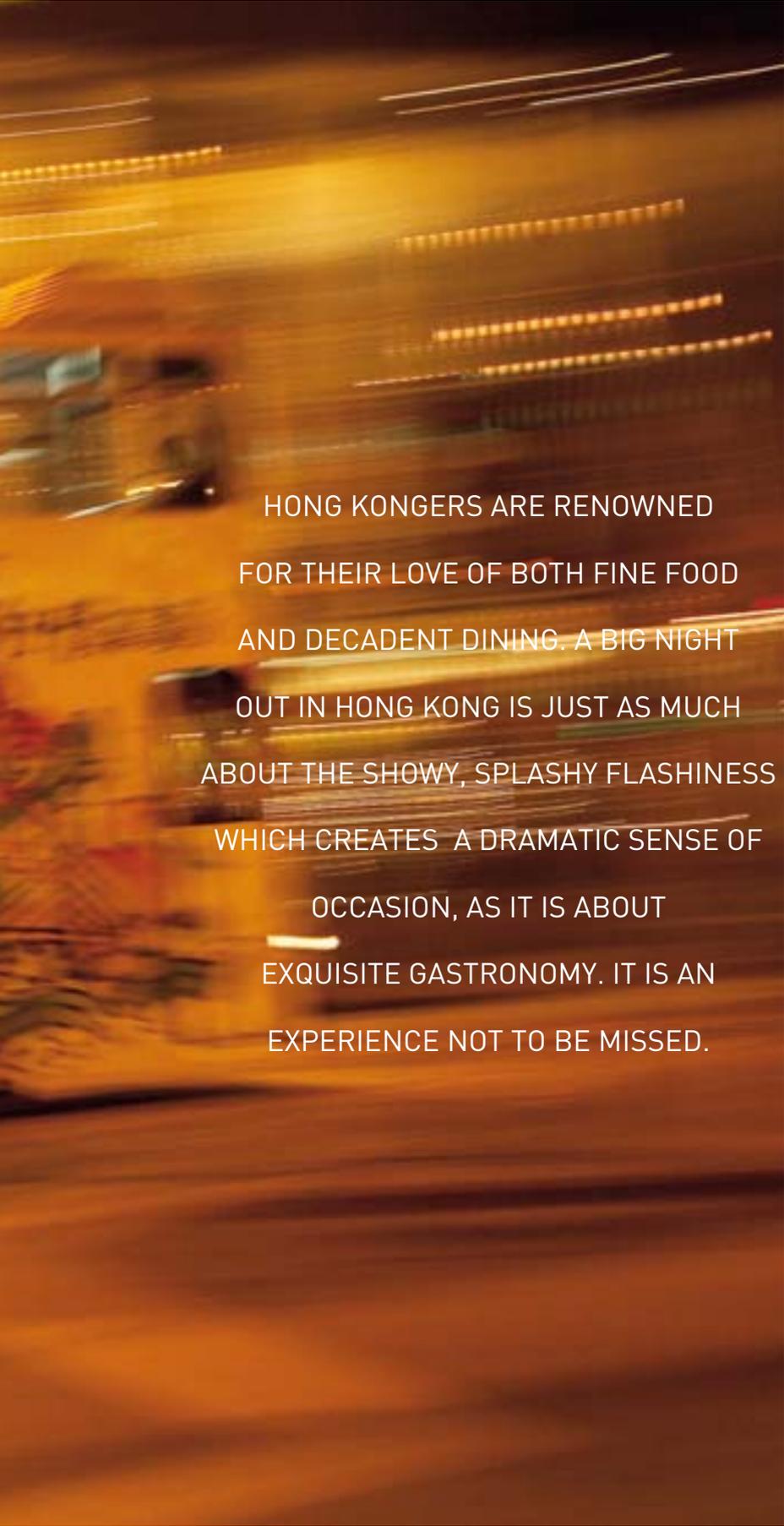
Mix the eggs with water, soy sauce, pepper, tapioca flour and shitake mushrooms. Pour into four heatproof bowls and cover with two layers of cling wrap. Poke a few holes in the cling wrap with a small knife.

Steam for 15 minutes at 100 degrees Celsius. Garnish with carrots, broccoli, kaiware and fried garlic before serving.









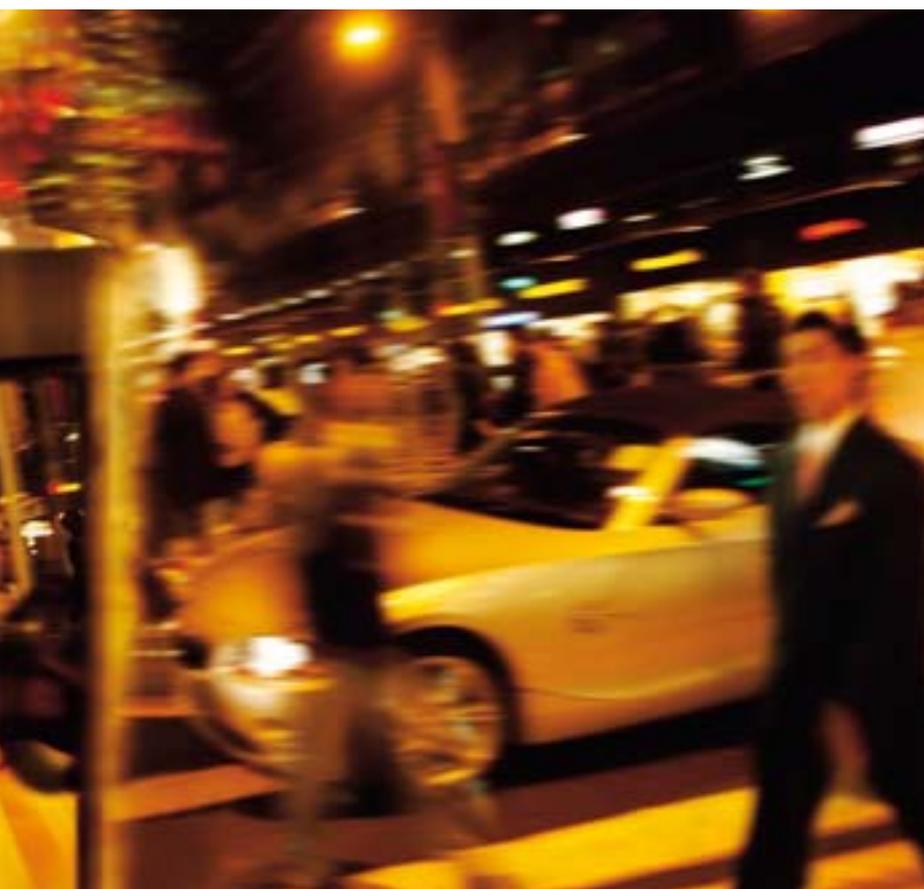
HONG KONGERS ARE RENOWNED FOR THEIR LOVE OF BOTH FINE FOOD AND DECADENT DINING. A BIG NIGHT OUT IN HONG KONG IS JUST AS MUCH ABOUT THE SHOWY, SPLASHY FLASHINESS WHICH CREATES A DRAMATIC SENSE OF OCCASION, AS IT IS ABOUT EXQUISITE GASTRONOMY. IT IS AN EXPERIENCE NOT TO BE MISSED.







Hong Kong may not be able to lay claim to an indigenous cuisine, but it can certainly take great pride in its rich culinary culture. The city plays host to a dense concentration of culinary heritages from around the globe. In Hong Kong, one may truly start the day with a Cantonese breakfast or a croissant and café au lait, move on to something Austrian for lunch, indulge in an English high tea and then sit down to a Balinese dinner. And the following day, one would still have a plentiful selection of new gustatory choices to pick from! This city that never sleeps has no lack of sophisticated dining options. And Hong Kongers are renowned for their love of both fine food and decadent dining. A big night out in Hong Kong is just as much about the showy, splashy flashiness which creates a dramatic sense of occasion, as it is about exquisite gastronomy. It is an experience not to be missed.



However, the city's first Chinese settlers hailed from Canton (Guangzhou). Today, Cantonese cuisine remains most closely associated with the Special Administrative Region (SAR). Among all of China's regional cuisines, Canton's is most often regarded as the country's finest. This has been so for centuries. According to an age-old Chinese proverb, one should live in Hangzhou (believed to have the most beautiful views), marry in Suzhou (home to the loveliest women), dine in Guangzhou (Canton) and die in Liuzhou (where the best coffin wood can be found). This comes as no surprise since Cantonese cooks insist on absolute freshness in their produce and are impressively dextrous in transforming their raw ingredients into gastronomic wonders without suppressing each ingredient's natural splendour.









Though the best chefs in China come from Canton, it has to be said that the best in Canton usually make their way to Hong Kong! There is no better place to sample top-notch Cantonese cuisine than in Hong Kong. Even old-fashioned housewives living in the city make twice-daily trips to the vegetable and meat markets dotted throughout the SAR in their quest for the ultimate in freshness. The goal on each trip is to find produce that looks like it has literally been harvested from the earth or fished out of the ocean just moments ago. Chefs trained in Cantonese cuisine are also highly respected for their ability to control cooking temperatures with such masterful, split-second accuracy that they are able to emphasise and enhance every ingredient's splendid freshness. In addition, Hong Kong's chefs are particularly admired for their love of innovation. Improvisation and experimentation drive the Hong Kong school of Cantonese cuisine. The best chefs are gifted with an aptitude for incorporating ingredients from all over China into their dishes without losing the essence of their own culinary traditions. They have even adopted European baking techniques, reinterpreted stews and created their own versions of hamburgers without losing sight of the foundations of what makes their food Cantonese.

Then again, to imply that all Chinese food in Hong Kong is Cantonese would be doing the city a disservice. Following the declaration of the People's Republic of China in 1949, immigrants from all over the mainland fled to Hong Kong. Among them were numerous chefs—from Shanghai, Chaozhou, Sichuan, Beijing and elsewhere—who sought to religiously reproduce the authentic cuisines of their homelands. As a result, China's regional cuisines are also startlingly well represented in Hong Kong's home kitchens, dai pai dong (food stalls) and fine dining restaurants.





STEAM

CANTON HAS LONG, WARM AND WET DAYS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR WHICH CREATE THE PERFECT ENVIRONMENT FOR CULTIVATING MOST THINGS. AS SUCH, CANTONESE CHEFS HAVE DEVELOPED VARIED AND SOPHISTICATED CULINARY TECHNIQUES WHICH SERVE TO SHOWCASE THEIR LOCAL PRODUCE. THE FOCUS IS ON ACCENTUATING ITS FRESHNESS, SO THE CUISINE OF THIS REGION VEERS AWAY FROM STRONG TASTING SAUCES AND DEEP-FRYING. STEAMING IS A FAVOURED METHOD OF COOKING. IN HONG KONG, THE FRESHEST SEAFOOD IS STEAMED TO PRESERVE ITS NATURAL FLAVOURS. EACH NIGHT, YOU ARE LIKELY TO FIND FRESHLY STEAMED WHOLE FISH AT ALMOST EVERY FAMILY DINNER TABLE. **KINSEN KAM**

Kinsen Kam No introduction to Hong Kong's dining scene is complete without a mention of Yung Kee Restaurant and its famed roasted goose. Over 50 years ago, the modest food stall on Kwong Yuen West Street where founder Kam Shui Fai first launched his business, was already regarded as a major gastronomic stop for tourists and visiting crewmen. Since then, Kam's roasted goose has received such worldwide acclaim that people affectionately refer to him as Roast Goose Fai. Today, the plush, multi-level Yung Kee restaurant sits on Wellington Street in its own building and avid fans can even purchase what the restaurant calls its Flying Roasted Goose—their signature roasted fowl conveniently packaged so that travellers can transport them aboard airplanes.

Kam's son, Kinsen grew up in the restaurant kitchen and officially started work at Yung Kee when he was 17. In 1978, he took over the management of the family business, which he continues to run today. The younger Kam—who prefers to don traditional Chinese attire—has a poetic, scholar-philosopher's approach to life, business and cuisine. In conversation, he has a penchant for quoting legendary Chinese philosopher, Confucius. To Kinsen Kam, Chinese dishes are like works of art. Consequently, the chef-artist's challenge lies in having to create a balance between taste and presentation. While a diner first needs to be impressed by the look of the dish, it is equally important that he is impressed by its flavour.

"Chinese cooking is about feeling," the soft-spoken gentleman explains. "And being a great chef is about cooking from the heart. When a chef cooks from the heart, diners will be able to taste it in his dishes. Chinese chefs rarely use measuring cups. They simply add a little more sauce or herbs based on what they feel as they prepare each dish.





It is a natural instinct. It's also about being fast and accurate by simply working with their bare hands."

The second generation restaurateur continues to meet with Yung Kee's head chef, Master Tong every day to discuss restaurant menus, ingredients and the development of new dishes. Although the dishes served at Yung Kee Restaurant closely adhere to the traditions of Cantonese cuisine, Kam is constantly on the lookout for new ways to surprise his guests. He particularly enjoys travelling because it gives him the opportunity to sample delicacies from other culinary traditions. These experiences often inspire ideas for his business.

"I was recently in Spain," he says. "And I really enjoyed their Serrano ham and chorizo. They go very well with good red wine. In India, I especially enjoyed the special spices, such as saffron, which they use in their cooking."

Nonetheless, Kam's favourite cuisine is still Cantonese. He takes pleasure in working with the fresh ingredients that are so readily available in Hong Kong, especially the fantastic seafood the city enjoys because of its harbour and coastline. In his opinion, Cantonese cooking techniques retain the very best, natural flavours of seafood.

The Kam family's passion for food and their collective dedication to preserving their culinary heritage is admirable. "I enjoy eating. I enjoy seeing customers who have been visiting this restaurant for a long time," Kam admits. "They are like my friends." Kam has three sons, two of whom are working at Yung Kee. However, he believes that these third generation restaurateurs will have to be trained for some time yet before they are allowed to take the reins of the business, just as he was trained by his own father, the legendary Roast Goose Fai.





香
港





STEAMED GOOSE AND TARO IN PLUM SAUCE

Serves 4



1 goose (approximately 3kg)
250g taro (yam)
3Tbsp soy sauce
225ml oil



Marinade

4 cloves garlic, peeled and fried whole
1/4 piece dried orange peel
2Tbsp chu-hau sauce (sweet bean paste flavoured with orange peel and Chinese herbs)
1/2 piece fermented red bean curd
1Tbsp sesame paste (or tahini)
2Tbsp oyster sauce
Small pinch five spice powder
75g brown sugar
5 salted (preserved) plums, pitted
1 star anise



Combine marinade ingredients. Rub mixture into goose cavity then seal opening with skewers. Blanch goose and glaze its exterior with soy sauce.

Peel and cut taro into thick slices (measuring roughly 5cm by 3cm).

Heat oil in a large pan. Pour hot oil onto the skin of the goose until it turns golden brown (keep the inside of the goose raw). Next, place taro slices in the hot oil for about 1 minute or until their exteriors turn golden brown.

Steam goose at 100 degrees Celsius for 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Remove goose. Pour sauce from goose cavity into a container and chop goose into pieces. Place taro slices onto a heatproof plate and top with chopped goose. Pour the sauce over both and steam for another 10 minutes at 100 degrees Celsius.

Serve hot.





STEAMED GROUPEL WITH CHINESE HAM AND MUSHROOMS

Serves 4

250g grouper fillet
3 dried shitake mushrooms
6 slices Chinese ham
6 stalks kailan (kale)
6 slices ginger
225ml chicken broth
2Tbsp corn flour



Soak dried shitake mushrooms in water until they become soft. Drain and steam for 10 minutes at 100 degrees Celsius. Cut each into half.

Clean grouper fillet. Season with salt and pepper, and cut into six pieces.

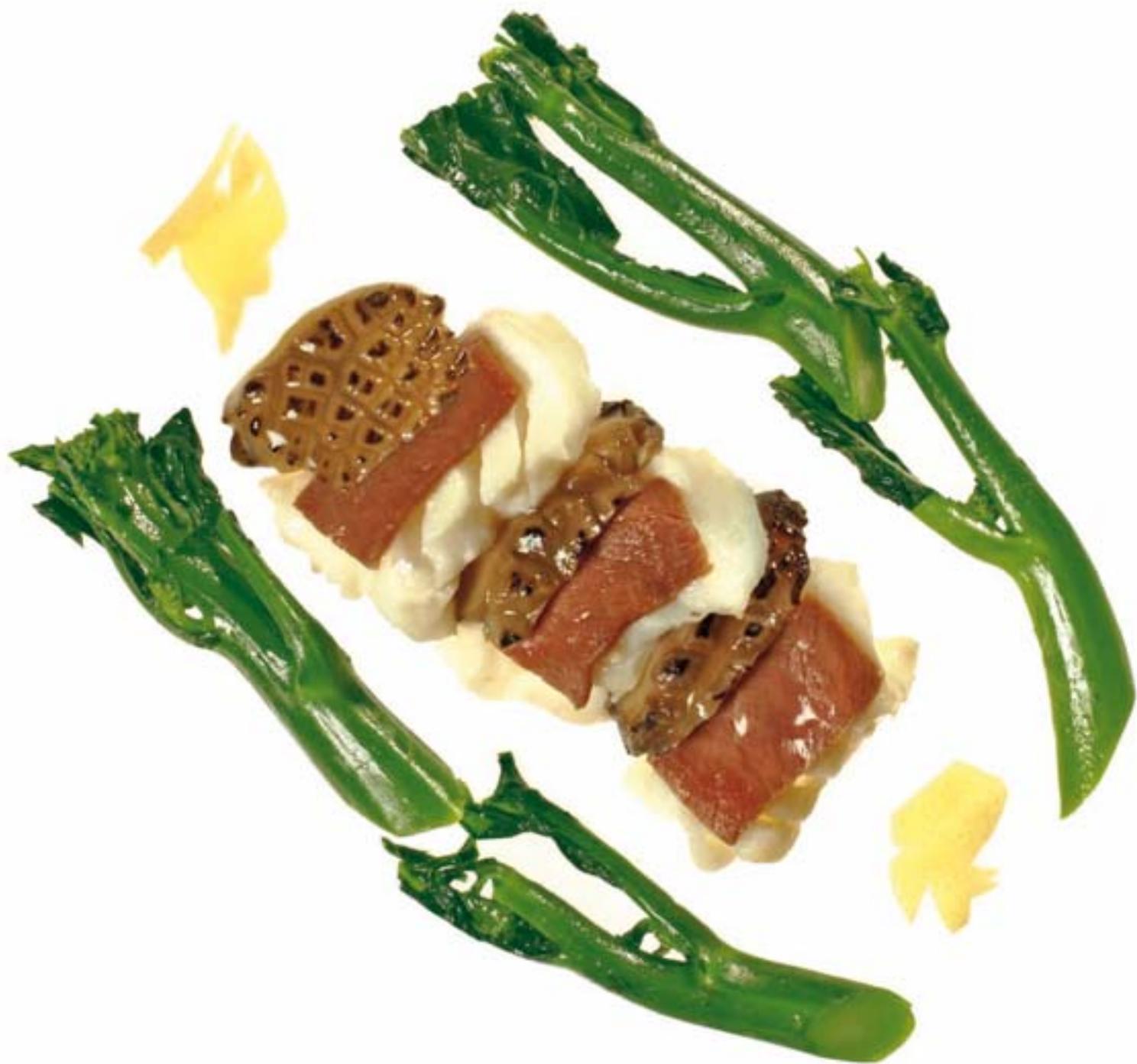
Place grouper fillets, shitake mushrooms and Chinese ham on a heatproof plate. Place a slice of ginger on top of each piece of fish.

Steam for 6 to 8 minutes at 85 degrees Celsius.

Wash kailan and cut into smaller pieces. Blanch in chicken broth and place on a serving dish with the steamed grouper fillets.

Reheat chicken broth in a saucepan. Mix corn flour with some cold water.

Pour the corn flour mixture into the chicken broth a little at a time until it thickens. Pour over fish and serve hot.





STEAMED CUCUMBER WITH PRAWNS

Serves 4

3 cucumbers
450g prawns, shelled and veins removed
Salt and pepper to taste
120g broccoli florets
Small pinch saffron
225ml chicken broth
2Tbsp corn flour



Flatten prawns and blend (in a food processor) to create a thick paste.

Season with salt and pepper, and mix well.

Peel cucumbers and cut into 3cm thick cylinders. Core cucumber pieces and fill them with prawn paste.

Top each cucumber cylinder with a little saffron. Steam them for 7 minutes at 100 degrees Celsius.

Blanch broccoli in chicken broth. Place the broccoli and steamed cucumber cylinders on a serving plate.

Reheat chicken broth in a saucepan. Mix corn flour with some cold water. Pour corn flour mixture into the chicken broth a little at a time until it thickens. Pour the thickened sauce over the cucumber cylinders and serve hot.



GLOSSARY OF INGREDIENTS



SHALLOTS These are small red onions which have a more intense, sweet flavour than regular onions.



GINSENG A highly prized medicinal root which is widely used in Korean cooking.



GREATER GALANGAL Also known as lengkuas or blue ginger. It should be peeled before it is used in dishes.



SOUR CARAMBOLA Also called belimbi or belimbing. It is a very small, sour fruit with a distinctive flavour.



FRESH SHITAKE MUSHROOMS Also called Chinese black mushrooms, they taste earthy and meaty.



DRIED SHITAKE MUSHROOMS These are often preferred over fresh shiitake because of their intense flavour.



DRIED ORANGE PEEL These are meant to be softened in water before use. They infuse dishes with a subtle citrus flavour.



SAFFRON The world's most expensive spice. It gives dishes a distinct yellow colour and earthy aroma.



CHESTNUTS Nut of the sweet chestnut tree. Edible when cooked.



DRIED RED DATES The Chinese believe that these sweet jujubes relieve fatigue and hypertension.



BAMBOO SHOOT This needs to be harvested when the shoot is young and tender. Only the inner part of the shoot is eaten.



DRIED PRAWNS These are sometimes labelled dried shrimp. They have a strong, pungent flavour.



WALNUTS These are rich and flavourful. They need to be shelled and skinned before use.



YUNNAN HAM Chinese cured ham. May be substituted with Smithfield ham.



GINGER Ginger has natural antibacterial properties and is believed to stimulate circulation.



KELP Also referred to as konbu, kombu or sea tangle. Kelp is often used in Japanese and Korean kitchens for making stock.



KING OYSTER MUSHROOM This mushroom is firm-textured and meaty from the base to the cap. It is also called eryngii, eringii or royal trumpet.



TURMERIC Fresh turmeric should be peeled and crushed or blended. It is often used in Southeast Asia to give curries a rich yellow hue.

GLOSSARY OF INGREDIENTS



WINTER MELON Also called waxed gourd or white gourd.



KIDNEY BEANS These are the mature seeds of haricot beans.



GREEN BEANS These are actually unhulled mung beans. They are a good source of dietary fibre.



STAR ANISE Dried fruit of a tree belonging to the magnolia family. Its seeds taste like liquorice.



ADZUKI BEANS Adzuki or red beans are extremely popular in China, Japan and Korea. They are usually featured in desserts.



CANDLENUTS A hard, oily nut which is usually sold shelled. May be substituted with Brazil nuts or macadamias.



LEMONGRASS The inner stalks have a strong, lemon-like flavour and aroma. It is the lower part of the stalk that is used in cooking.



DRIED SCALLOPS Also called conpoy, dried scallops are used to flavour soups, sauces and other dishes. A small quantity goes a long way.



SHISO LEAVES Also referred to as perilla leaves, these taste like a cross between basil and mint. The Japanese believe that these leaves have antiseptic properties.

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