

SUMMER SKINSAVERS | BOTÁNICAS SPIRITUAL REMEDIES | BUDOKON YOGA

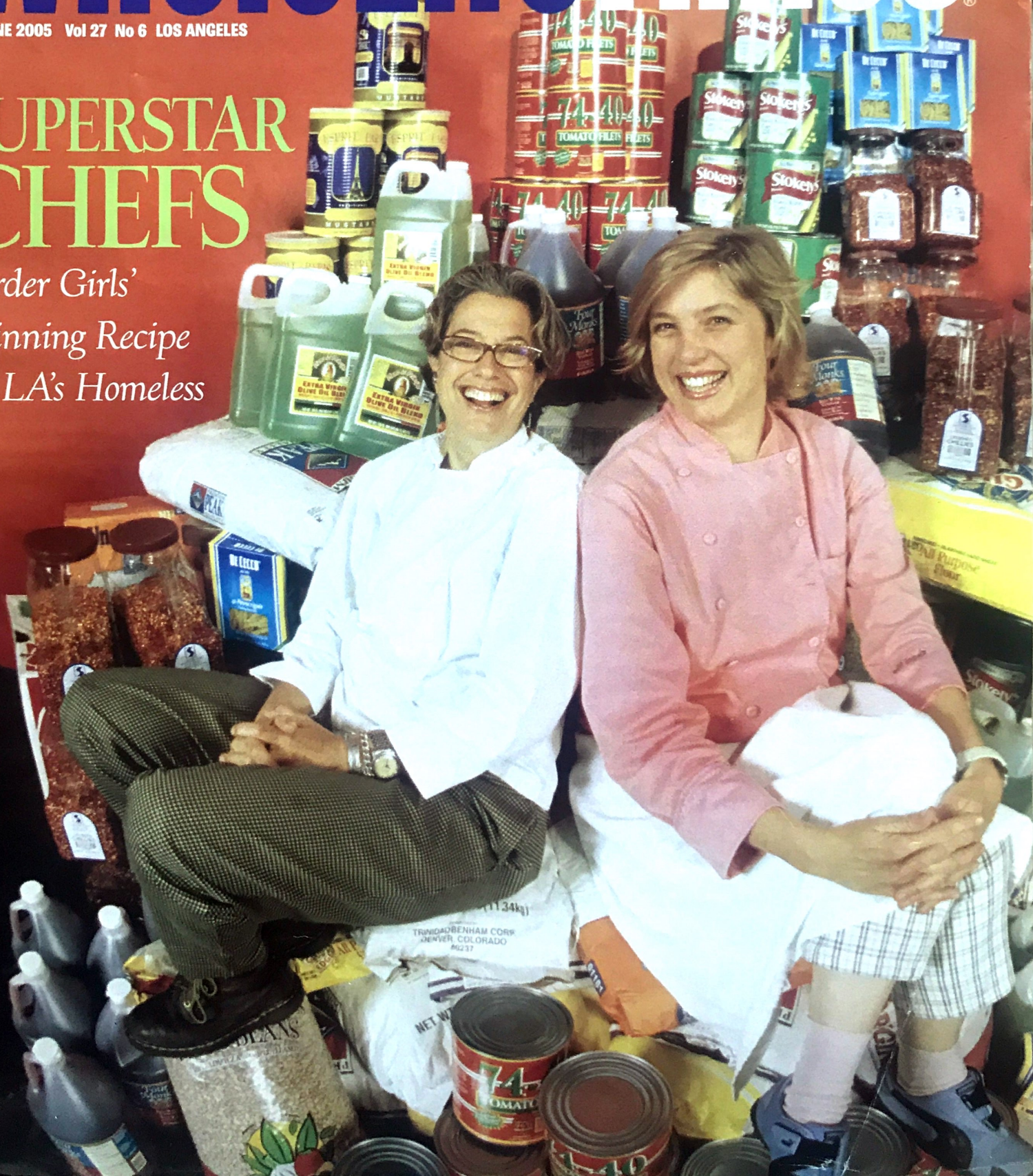
A DRAGONFLY MEDIA PUBLICATION

WholeLifeTimes®

JUNE 2005 Vol 27 No 6 LOS ANGELES

SUPERSTAR CHEFS

*Border Girls'
Winning Recipe
for LA's Homeless*





PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHARE OUR STRENGTH

Cooking Up Possibility, Delivering Hope

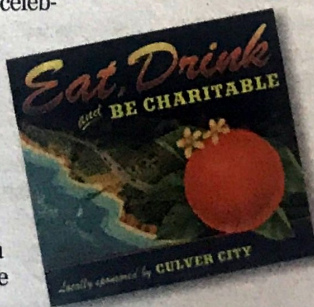
Despite their gilded niche in the high-end foodie universe, Border Girls Susan Feniger and Mary Sue Milliken share a down-to-earth desire to feed the hungriest

BY ELYSE GLICKMAN

There is no doubting chefs Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger's celebrity status. These local ladies enjoy a secure orbit in the celeb-chef stratosphere with three destination restaurants, a popular radio show (*In the KFI Kitchen with Mary Sue and Susan*), a line of premium food products, top-selling cookbooks, a stream of press coverage and, most importantly, their strikingly different, equally charismatic personalities. While the petite, bouncy, brunette Feniger is reminiscent of a hip teacher or fun-loving college roommate, the

statuesque Milliken's blonde patrician looks and dreamy air suggest an engaging museum curator with a desire to share her knowledge with the world.

Still, when it comes to satisfying people's hunger, Milliken and Feniger are on the same plate. Even as their resume of professional accomplishments continues to rise like a perfect soufflé, these inspired partners have never lost sight of their commitment to an impressive list of charitable endeavors, including Share our Strength (SOS), a national nonprofit working to inspire and organize individuals and businesses to help end hunger. And if one event highlights the duo's determination to make the most of their public personas, it's their involvement in Taste of the Nation (www.tasteofthenation.org), SOS'



annual benefit taking place in LA on Sunday, June 5 at Media Park in Culver City.

For Milliken, who is co-chair of SOS, hunger is an omnipresent issue. One could argue that pretty much every chef with a name in LA attaches it to a number of good causes—after all, you can't beat the exposure. However, Milliken insists name-dropping alone just doesn't cut it if you are serious about giving back to the community. When speaking about SOS-LA's efforts against hunger, Milliken bypasses her efficient inner multi-tasker and gushes like an enthusiastic kid leading you on a walk through Media Park with the sights, sounds and smells of a perfectly executed afternoon picnic... for thousands.

"This year is going to be our best ever," Milliken declares confidently. "A lot has been done to enable more people to contribute to this organization as never before...[It] has a definite 'country fair' feeling to it, and with a lower admission fee [\$75]—we are making helping Share Our Strength easier and more family friendly.

"Hunger is a political issue hitting every layer of society. When kids are hungry, they don't learn well," continues Milliken, mother of two sons, Keiran and Declan. "And adults get violent if they are hungry. As chefs, we should care more about people being properly nourished than practically anything else, especially considering a huge amount of food is being wasted daily. What we've both observed with charity events through the years is affluent people being brought together for a party at some rich person's house. Many of the events we do, and especially Taste of The Nation, are the antithesis of this because it opens the philanthropic experience to everybody. It literally allows us to share our strength—preparing and serving good food."

Of course, Milliken could speak about the merits of good food for hours, but Feniger diplomatically interrupts her to get to her idea of the heart of the matter—the experiences that laid the foundation for their commitment to community and health-oriented causes.

"I come from a Jewish home where food was a huge focus, and we enjoyed the abundance. We often set down two main dishes, and pretty much everybody in the family could cook," recalls Feniger matter-of-factly, as she casually puts her feet up. "My parents taught us that giving back to the community, like eating, was an essential part of the human experience. I can't even count the number of discussions Dad had with all of us about how much of his income went to charity. My mother, meanwhile, was very involved in hands-on volunteer work in nursing homes late in her own life."

For several beats, as Feniger paints her warm family portrait, Milliken seems to reach back in search of the defining situations that pushed her



Chefs at last year's event toast to its success.

Taste of the Nation opens the philanthropic experience to everybody. It literally allows us to share our strength—preparing and serving good food.

toward community service. "I grew up in a single parent home," she shares. "While our family wasn't involved with philanthropy the way Susan's was, what raised my consciousness was that my father lived in a shelter for 10 years. This made me aware of the need to do community service and change perceptions about homelessness and hunger. There is the notion that indigent people are lazy and their being in this state is somehow their fault. My father certainly experienced this as he worked very hard to move himself back into the mainstream."

As the room fills with the pleasant fragrance of baking tortillas, Milliken and Feniger take a moment to observe members of their staff preparing for the lunch rush. The two seem astonishingly serene, unperturbed that within an hour's time they are sure to be bombarded with hungry customers. Feniger

makes friendly small talk with waiters laying out chips and three varieties of salsa, while Milliken expresses her pride that all the members of the Border Grill crew see themselves as a community rather than a just a collection of employees. She believes this was accomplished by encouraging people at all levels—from busboys to management—to think outside the kitchen.

Both chefs fondly recall the occasion when they transformed a perfunctory sexual harassment seminar into a wellspring of goodwill by staging it at a local food bank. With the seminar out of the way, their crew spent several hours preparing care packages for needy single parents and the elderly, breaking the food bank's records with the number of finished packages produced.

Amy Hewitt, Controller for Border Grill and Ciudad restaurants, vividly remembers that day. "Although things were a tiny bit awkward in the beginning, once we all got into sync as a team, it turned into an intensely energizing and thought-provoking experience, especially seeing up close how Mary Sue and Susan get themselves out there and make things happen," she says. "Doing physical work in that assembly line enabled us not only to bond, but to feel like we were a part of something bigger because we could see the results of our efforts. While those of us working for Mary Sue and Susan are in the business of making great food, combating the real hunger issue puts everything into a different perspective. In turn, it has made my job all the more meaningful."

Iona Muir, General Manager of Ciudad, concurs. "What inspires Border Grill employees as a whole is that Mary Sue and Susan genuinely

Continued on page 38

care about charities and the city they serve on a very personal level," Muir observes. Muir has participated in two Feniger and Milliken-led events at local food banks and has also helped coordinate staff to prepare Thanksgiving dinner for 300 children and 200 adults at Our Lady of Angels Church through the Para Los Niños charity. "The extent of their caring not only makes them great role models as employers, but makes it easy to see how they have maintained such loyalty and low employee turnover in an industry known for high turnover."

Feniger also delights in detailing how the beneficiaries of SOS and affiliated programs like the St. Joseph's Center Food Service Job Training Program in Venice not only learn to work their way out of hunger, but end up with an enriched and an enlightened view of their community as a by-product. "There is a gentleman from St. Joseph's who has been helping us out at our booth at the farmer's market, answering questions about St. Joseph's programs and collecting donations for Share Our Strength," says Feniger with a proud mama's broad smile. "And another graduate of the program, who now works at Whole Foods and is recognized by shoppers as a cheese expert, has taken great pride in how his life has new focus and meaning."

The St. Joseph's six-week training program teaches cooking, job search and life strategy skills seven times a year to people with "multiple barriers." After four-week apprentice placements in a local hospital kitchen, attendees are assisted in finding paying kitchen jobs. Their success rate is close to 70 percent placement within 90 days of graduating from the program.

Listening to Milliken and Feniger recall life lessons, defining moments and career highs feels like watching a PBS travelogue. From their formative years proving themselves as token female chefs at Chicago's Le Perroquet to their dramatically contrasting job experiences in France (Milliken's chilly, stuffy existence in Paris vs. Feniger's familial post at a country restaur-



PHOTO: STEVE SHEA

Culinary bookends

rant in the provincial south), to the formation of their partnership in California, Milliken and Feniger have worked hard to build their culinary empire.

Despite their phenomenal success, the two women come across as humble and genuine philanthropists. Still, even in light repartee they seem astutely aware that they are transmitting a more important message to the listener, be it an aspiring chef, a person struggling out of homelessness or a food writer. While SOS tops their current list of priorities, their ongoing roster of charitable involvements ranges from gay & lesbian issues to health, animal rights and children's causes. Other groups receiving a heaping helping of Border Girls' good will include The National Heart Association, The Kidney Foundation, The American Cancer Society and Outfest.

Just as Milliken has put heart and soul into Share our Strength, Feniger is equally passionate about

the Scleroderma Research Foundation (www.srfcure.org), in tribute to a courageous, intrepid college friend stricken by the degenerative disease. She and Milliken chef the foundation's Cool Comedy-Hot Cuisine events that have attracted top talent like Robin Williams, Ellen DeGeneres, Jay Leno and Lily Tomlin and raised millions for SRF.

"We can be effective since our status gives us a mouthpiece, whether people hear the message through our restaurant, our show, our Farmer's Market booth or charity events," notes Feniger philosophically as her finely tuned waitstaff whiz past her to light candles and lay place settings. "It is our responsibility to make a strong statement for causes that affect everybody in one way or another."

A summons from the kitchen informs The Girls that lunch and recipe testing for their forthcoming turn on The Food Network's *Iron Chef America* need their immediate attention. However, Milliken, determined to communicate her fervor for her mission to end hunger, shares one more thought, hoping that the duo's collective enthusiasm will spill over into the community—more precisely, the 2,000 people they hope to entice to this year's Taste of The Nation.

"We give a lot, but we get twice as much back because we are making many people more aware. We also learn a lot in terms of expertise and business acumen," she explains. "While I am becoming even more involved with work as a leading member of the SOS board, both of us want to get our community of 350 employees and our patrons more involved in the community that has supported us."

The kitchen door closes behind them, and inside this cloistered space their prolific lineup of shows, including Taste of the Nation, goes on. **WLT**

Sherman Oaks-based Elyse Glickman's work has been published in LUCIRE, Sportswear International, Boulevard, The Book L.A. and FIT. This is her first article for WLT.

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DOOR-TO-DOOR and KITCHEN-TO-TABLE

Switching to a meatless diet can be daunting, but four dine-in delivery programs make it deliciously doable

By Elyse Glickman



Photo: Sepi Kashanian

IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY AND YOUR BODY IS DEMANDING ATTENTION. MAYBE YOU'VE HAD NONSTOP MEETINGS or been racing from soccer practice to piano lessons. If you're lucky, you hit the yoga studio or took a run to alleviate the stress of a ridiculously busy day. But even if you're feeling ravenous, you're not someone to mindlessly eat the first thing you see (at least not most of the time). What's a busy person to do? Like hundreds of Angelenos, you can take advantage of a meal service that makes mindful eating one less thing to worry about. Corporate diet-food delivery services may offer convenience, but most cannot deliver what you truly hunger for: fresh, satisfying, preferably organic foods free of unnecessary flavors, colors, preservatives and chemicals.

Happily, help is here with four food-delivery services that offer flavor, convenience and nutrition in line with your food choices.



Top, right: Mother Organica's roasted vegetable couscous; Above: executive chef and founder of Mother Organica, Sepi Kashanian.

MotherOrganica

Sepi Kashanian, executive chef and founder of MotherOrganica (www.motherorganica.com), prepares specialized meals for her clientele, but you won't find a menu or diet plan on her web site.

"I started three years ago," Kashanian says, after having been "a private chef with clients who preferred to have their home and kitchen to themselves. I operate in the same fashion today, and have a very interactive relationship with my clients. They tell me what they want and do not want, as well as any food allergies, sensitivities and preferences."

Kashanian's personal approach is refreshing. She breezes into a client's kitchen with a variety of dishes—perhaps Thai fusion cashew coconut curry, vegetable fusilli pasta, red quinoa meatloaf or barley salad with mixed veggies—along with simple cooking directions on how to "finish" each meal for a true homemade feel.

She explains, "My culinary training gives me the skills I need to prepare dishes that reconcile flavor and texture with nutritional needs advised by clients' doctors or dieticians. Before I became

vegetarian three years ago, I had eaten, tasted and cooked a large variety of foods, so it is still familiar in my taste buds for me to recreate the flavors and textures I know people crave."

In addition to custom-prepared vegan meals, Kashanian also tries to deliver a greater awareness of the way food choices affect our environment and community.

RAWvolution

In 2001, founder Matt Amsden made it his business to think "inside the Box," introducing health-conscious diners to nutritionally sound raw foods that go beyond the familiar vegetarian diet. RAWvolution (www.rawvolution.com) prepares a weekly customized Box for each client, with raw meals that maintain the highest level of nutritional integ-



RAWvolution's veggie burger.

Photo: Andrea Gómez Romero

nity. The dishes are made with organic ingredients, 90 percent of which are sourced locally and purchased directly from farmers. The philosophy extends to the company's biodegradable/compostable containers, and composting food scraps.

"There were and are still few options available to those interested in prepared raw meals," Amsden remarks. "I wanted to make them available to people no matter where they live in the country, and provide them meals they can take with them to work or have waiting for them at home when they return from a long day. The Box also allows people access to prepared raw meals wherever in the country they may travel.

The signature Big Matt with Cheese, a dehydrated seed and veggie patty with fixin's on the company's popular onion flatbread, is flavorful and filling, as are the soups and chilled green salads. Other offerings, such as an eggless salad and couscous, have textures and flavors that are heaven for raw foodies, but may require some getting used to for newbies, along with the concept that raw foods, as the name suggests, should not be heated.

Vegin' Out

Back in 2000, brothers Dan and Tim Boissy realized that although vegan and vegetarian food had become quite evolved and palatable, they were not aware of any meal services offering strictly vegan meals. They also realized most of L.A.'s meal delivery services were priced out of reach for the average person.

"Our mission is to provide a simple, affordable and sustainable way to get vegan meals delivered right to your door," says Dan Boissy. "Most people



Photo: Darren Randle
Vegin' Out's coconut curry chick peas

are too busy to find time to cook a healthy meal every night, and Vegin' Out (www.VeginOut.com) is here to help and to educate. Before experiencing our food, many people think that following a vegan diet means that they have to eat bland food. That just isn't true."

Rather than offering limitless choices, Boissy says the weekly Vegin' Out delivery takes a "Trader Joe's-like" approach that keeps customer costs down and gives them the freedom to portion and pair the dishes however they like.

"Like Trader Joe's, you don't have a million choices for bagels. You have three or four, which ensures good quality products at an affordable price, as well as a low-stress shopping experience," he says. "I think we differ from our competitors on price and simplicity.

Paleta

As a 25-year cancer survivor, Kelly Boyer built Paleta (www.paleta.com) out of her personal appreciation for the value of nutrition and how it affects not only physical health, but also mental well-being.

"We believe that everybody is different and should be nourished accordingly," Boyer notes. "We encourage new clients to pay attention to how they're feeling throughout the day so we can learn how their body reacts to certain foods, which helps to identify what is right for them. As a philosophy, Paleta eliminates 95 percent of gluten, dairy, soy and sugar from our meals." However, meat is an option.

My customized meals were created based on a questionnaire through the user-friendly website, and although delivery is more private-home than apartment friendly, the effort of getting up to let the delivery man in was well worth it. I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that most of my meals were as filling as they were fresh, though my lunch items ranked highest in terms of flavor, seasoning and texture.

"When we started, organic food was a major trend, but now people realize that sourcing locally grown fruits and vegetables from small farms is just as important," says Boyer. "Our meals and snacks are handcrafted for each client, allowing us to give them exactly what they need to meet their individual nutrition and fitness goals."

You can't go wrong with any of these options, you just have to decide which one fits best with your lifestyle and taste. You may as well enjoy trying them all. 🍴

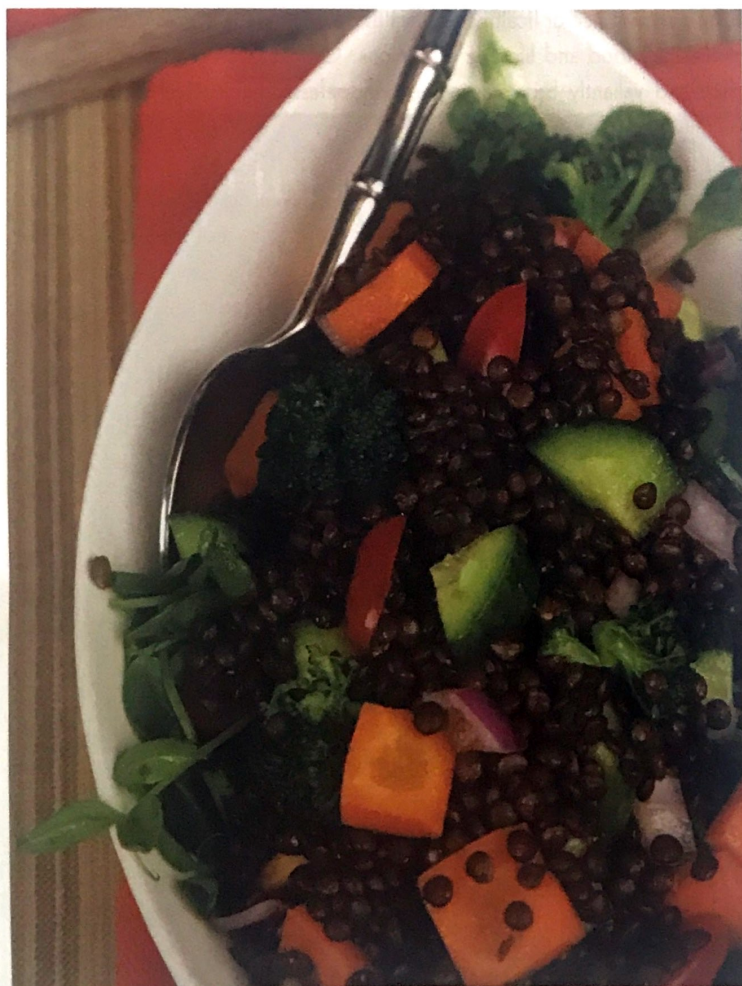


Photo: Courtesy, Paleta
Paleta's lentil salad

UNIQUE RICE from Thailand

Going with the Grain

By Elyse Glickman



During Songkran, the Thai New Year (April 13–15), food plays a major role in the festivities, particularly dishes built around Thai hom mali rice, which we know as jasmine rice. Thailand's prime cash crop, in a country that produces an estimated 19,000 varieties of rice, brings not only flavor and substance to dishes you can prepare at home, but also a nutritional boost.

White jasmine rice is a good source of niacin, thiamine, iron, selenium, and vitamins B1 and D. However, the darker the rice, the more benefits you get, with higher concentrations of vitamin E, B6, magnesium, iron, thiamin and other nutrients. Whole grains also have insoluble fiber, aiding digestion by helping flush food quickly through the digestive system. Additionally, vitamins and minerals in jasmine rice may help prevent certain cancers.

Beyond that, if you have not gotten to your January 1 New Year's resolution of losing weight, Songkran gives you a fresh opportunity.

"Thai people do not 'go on a diet' the way Western people do around the New Year," notes Chantira J. Vivatrat, former executive director of the Thai Trade Center in Los Angeles. "There is little need to diet, as most Thai dishes are low fat but highly nutritious. Many Thais are height/weight proportionate, particularly when compared to people who consume diets of processed and artificial foods."

LA-born, Las Vegas-based chef Jet Tila recommends hom mali rice not only for traditional Thai favorites, but also for rice-based dishes from other culinary traditions. He notes it works beautifully for pilafs, puddings, dressing, stuffing, and even as a cream replacement to thicken soup.

"With fresh herbs, vegetables and spices, such as turmeric and basil, replacing the use of excess salt, starch and fat, Thai food allows one to get flavor and nutritional balance on the same plate," notes Tila, a recent contender on *Iron Chef America*. "I tell people preparing it at home to remember the 'yum' (indicative of the spicy/sour flavor profile found on many Thai restaurant menu items), as the flavor profiles are a balance of hot, sour, salty and sweet. When you use core ingredients such as brown hom mali rice, fish sauce, Thai chili, lime juice and judicious touches of sugar, you will find the yum as well as the yummy in Thai dishes."

Thai Risotto

- ¼ c olive oil
- 1 tbs panang curry paste
- 1 tbs chopped garlic
- 1¼ c hom mali rice, rinsed & drained
- 2 tbsp Thai fish sauce
- 1 tsp honey
- ½ c diced sweet red peppers
- 1 c diced tomato
- 1½ c diced oyster, shiitake, portobello or white mushrooms
- 2 tbsp pine nuts, toasted
- 1 tbsp diced mozzarella cheese
- ½ c half-and-half or evaporated skim milk
- 2 tsp thin-sliced kaffir lime leaves
- 4 sprigs basil
- 1 can coconut milk

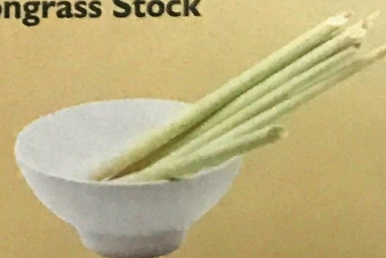
Place water, lemongrass stock (see recipe to right), galangal root, lime leaves, onion, carrot and celery in

large stock pot and bring to boil. Cook over medium high heat until stock is reduced to 1 quart and strain.

Combine olive oil, curry paste and garlic in a large skillet and saute over high heat until mixture turns red. Add rice, stirring constantly for 1 minute. Add lemongrass stock and simmer 10 minutes, stirring every minute to keep rice from sticking to skillet. Add coconut milk, fish sauce, honey, red pepper, tomato and mushrooms, and cook 5 minutes, stirring every minute. Add pine nuts, mozzarella and half-and-half, and cook 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Add lime leaves and ½ cup basil, and cook 1 minute. Remove from heat. Serve in bowls garnished with basil sprigs.

Lemongrass Stock

- 6 c water
- 1 stalk lemongrass
- 4 pieces dried galangal root
- 4 kaffir lime leaves
- 1 onion, cut in half
- 1 large carrot, cut in half



Excerpted from *Tommy Tang's Noodles & Rice and Something Nice* (Lotus Press)

contributors

Elyse Glickman

I've had a lifelong love affair with food, especially rich things served during the holiday season. Unfortunately, it showed a little too well a few years ago.

As I am always interested in finding creative ways to have my cake and eat it too, I was inspired by the new breed of vegetarian and vegan restaurants creating sweets and savories that are also fantastic comfort foods.



FOOD OPTIONS GET "REAL" AT TERMINAL 4



By Elyse Glickman

Healthy eating prepares for take-off

Despite extra security and austerity in travel, LAX is answering the call for healthier, more wholesome options that can be enjoyed before or during a flight. Coming soon to Terminal 4: L.A. favorite Real Food Daily (RFD).

Having launched three successful Southland locations, Ann Gentry, founder and operating owner, propelled her concept (creative, organic plant-based fare) into an airport destination she is confident will fly not only with vegetarian, vegan and food-sensitive customers, but anybody seeking an alternative to the customary "airport food."

While RFD's contributions to the evolution of airport dining has been three years in the making, Gentry projects the venue will open in time for this year's busy holiday travel season.

"As people have to spend more time at airports because of security, they want to eat smarter," Gentry muses. Interest in fast food is waning, as people become more health conscious, and "what they will instead ultimately experience in Terminal 4 and at Tom Bradley Terminal next door are authentic, quality restaurants that all had their start in L.A. We are representing in our airport what is on the street and popular with locals."

Terminal space limits and time restrictions for travelers



mean a condensed version of her menu, but Gentry notes items featured were tested by regular customers and friends at the West Hollywood location over several weekends. Although there will be a handful of "grab-and-go" items for the plane, including chilled salads and a hummus wrap, RFD at LAX is all about delicious choices prepared fresh and customized to order.

"Our biggest meal period will be breakfast, served from 5-11am daily, with selections including pancakes, French toast, tofu scrambles, and our new tofu and English muffin-based RFD Breakfast Sammie," Gentry reports. "While our main courses and daily specials won't be on the menu, as hot doesn't travel well, we will have our Real Food Basics & Bowls, salads, starters, desserts and nachos—for in-terminal dining, of course. We're also excited about our full juice bar, which offers travelers far more than just a \$4 bottle of water."



Kimchi-maki photo: Tara Punzone (top right)

