

RECIPES FROM OUR FAVORITE MEN

JUNE 2005

COOKING  
WITH FIRE

# Gourmet

THE MAGAZINE OF GOOD LIVING

## THE GRILL OF IT ALL

STEAK · SAUSAGES · PORK · SALAD · CHICKEN · CAKE  
+COOL GRILL TOOLS

40 RECIPES  
IN 30  
MINUTES  
OR LESS

SPOTLIGHT:  
SHOULD  
ONE COMPANY  
DECIDE  
WHAT WE EAT?

LOOK SHARP: TESTING SLICERS

U.S.A. \$3.99  
CANADA \$4.99  
FOREIGN \$4.99



0 753334 7



## WHEN TOKYO MET LYON, OR THE RISE AND RISE OF ASIAN FUSION

TWENTY YEARS AGO, EAST AND WEST CONVERGED OVER A HOT STOVE. A LOOK BACK ILLUMINATES HOW FAR WE'VE COME AND WHO'S TAKING US EVEN FURTHER BY CAROLINE BATES

**A** RESTAURANT IN A CHAIN HOTEL at LAX is an unlikely birthplace for one of the most important changes in the way Americans eat. But in 1982, travelers killing time between flights would wander into the restaurant at the Sheraton La Reina and wonder where they'd landed. It was an age of rich *feuilletés*, but here a Japanese-born chef of Hawaiian and Japanese parentage was searing swordfish on a superhot flattop grill, *teppan*-style, and energizing it with a wasabi *beurre blanc* and *shiso* leaves.

Roy Yamaguchi was shaking up Los Angeles with what he would later dub Euro-Asian cooking, and he kept elevating the mix. At 385 North, on the edge of Beverly Hills, he wowed them with seafood *gyozas* (pot stickers) and the spicy, sparkly salads and sauces that became his signature. In 1988, he moved to Honolulu, opened Roy's, and helped spearhead Hawaiian regional cuisine. By the time he returned last February to open his 31st Roy's, in the suburb of Woodland Hills, not only the city but the entire country had changed. Ahi tartare had pushed shrimp cocktail off mainstream menus, sushi had penetrated mid-American malls and supermarkets, and chefs from the Pacific Rim to the eastern seaboard were surfing the Asian wave. We are now at full-tilt fusion.

Once called Yamaguchi the father of contemporary east-west cooking (at that point the term *Asian fusion* was a decade away), but he humbly demurred. "I was just exploring my heritage. I never set out to be trendy."

That Americans had a hearty appetite for fusion was proven five decades before Yamaguchi came on the scene. Victor Jules Bergeron, a party-loving San Franciscan with a genius for concocting tropical rum drinks, most likely had little more than a great saloon in mind when he opened Hinky Dinks, in Oakland, in 1934. But three years later, inspired by Don the Beachcomber, a Hollywood watering hole with a South Seas theme (where some believe the first Mai Tai was mixed),

Bergeron reinvented his bar as the Polynesian fantasy Trader Vic's, the first in a worldwide chain (of which, to my mind, the Beverly Hills location is still the best). Maybe the décor in a few of the restaurants was campy, but there was nothing fake about the gorgeous Tahitian tapas, the Polynesian carvings, and the koa-wood voyaging canoes slung overhead.

Early Asian fusion was fun, and frequently it was brilliant. Trader Vic's was a true innovator. Some might have disparaged the tiki-tacky pupu platter, but they scarfed down the fried crab- and cream-cheese-filled wontons dubbed crab Rangoon. And few meats anywhere could compare with Bergeron's Indonesian rack of lamb roasted in a wood-fired Chinese oven and served with a sauceboat of doctored peanut butter out of a jar.

Until the 1970s, however, Trader Vic's had little noticeable influence. Then French chefs like Paul Bocuse, Alain Senderens, and the Troisgros brothers, revolting against the old regime, began championing light sauces and seasonal foods and embracing new ingredients from around the world. The purity and artistry of Japanese cooking also captivated the French, and the Japanese, in turn, were awed by the long and logical evolution of French cuisine. By the late 1970s, French-trained Japanese chefs started to show up in Los Angeles, opening Zen-like little restaurants and charming diners with gingered *boeuf bourguignon*, vegetable *net-suke*, and duck à l'orange Japanese-style, which is to say spears of duck in a salad with candied kumquats and *shimeji* mushrooms.

Chaya Brasserie, a favorite of celebrities, stems from this early tradition of *nouvelle cuisine franco-japonaise*, and so does the perennial hipster spot Chaya Venice. At his elegant sushi bar, Restaurant Katsu, Japanese chef Katsu Michite was whipping up French-inflected dishes like seared bonito with fresh ginkgo nuts and burdock in red-wine sauce. >

Fusion's guiding lights: Beacon chef Kazuto Matsusaka; at Orris, snapper carpaccio with a bean-paste sauce, and the sleek counter.