

SIDE DISH

A serving of favorite things from the East Bay community

BY SERENA BARTLETT

KITCHEN VINTAGE

Its true—we all too often glorify the past, using the phrase “back in the day” to signify those times when things were simpler, more understandable. But really, the grass wasn’t always greener, was it? I find a consistent exception in the area of culinary antiques. I regularly use my bubba’s pickle jar, her serving utensils, and measuring cups; and my mother’s copper casserole, flour sifter, and paring knives. Each of these was made with a lasting quality that pairs perfectly with the memories of these same tools being used for generations to prepare delicious family meals. It can be hard to find the quality or style replicated today except in the high-end market. Finding such antiques can involve a lot of roaming around, but on a recent trip to the Niles district of Fremont (where you might find more antique shops per block than anywhere else on the planet) I found plenty of shops offering the kitschy and quirky, as well as the useful and dainty—all at very reasonable prices. I found oodles of salt and pepper shakers (including some that were poodle-shaped), Bakelite carving sets, all manner of flatware (matched and mismatched), hand-cranked beaters, working vintage toasters, cast-iron pots, baking dishes, and endless other items. The easiest shopping was at Bite and Browse, where the huge collections, by different sellers, are all in a row. At My Friends and I, I found the most elegant displays and a plethora of Swanky Swigs, collectable



patterned drinking glasses that are coming back in fashion. Skip the mall, with its poorly made imports that are only destined for the trash heap. Instead, enjoy the hunt and do your part in preserving part of the past and our ongoing culinary traditions.

For a list of antique shops in Niles, go to niles.org/buslist.htm

GRANDMA'S WISDOM

Lev Kilun couldn't forget that tart, effervescent beverage his grandmother used to pour for him. And when he decided to put down the tools of his engineering trade for a new passion, he was determined to re-create her perfect recipe. Three years and countless batches later, Lev was satisfied with his version of this healthful drink. He calls it Lev's Original Kombucha, but the drink is known by many names the world over: kvass (Russia and Ukraine), chicha (Latin America), malta (Puerto Rico), ibwatu (Zambia). Kombucha has a magical effect on your digestive system, which might be why Grandma serves it up. It's basically a lacto-fermentation of tea (or other base beverage, depending on the region), and drinking it effectively balances your internal pH, unofficially aiding in digestion, circulation, energy, and all-around good feelings. Lev says that his kombucha has the same pH as balsamic vinegar, but you wouldn't guess that from tasting it. He offers it plain (which looks and tastes like Champagne) or mixed with Belgian cassis juice for a “kir royale.” (The cas-



sis makes it a little less than local, since cassis is a “forbidden fruit” in the States because of its invasive growing habits.) Lev's Kombucha is smooth and easy to drink—not pungent as others on the market can be. Another plus is that Lev doesn't bottle his kombucha, since bottling requires that it be heated, and that effectively kills the enzymes and probiotics. Instead, he equips his distributors with a keg that keeps the kombucha fresh and under pressure, so you'll be getting it served “on tap.” Prost!

Look for Lev's bright green signs at these locations in Berkeley: Juice Appeal, 150 Berkeley Square; Post Meridian 1568 Oak View; Soop, 1511 Shattuck Ave; Ashkenaz, 1317 San Pablo Ave.; Bodywork Central, 1533

Shattuck Ave; in Oakland: New World Vegetarian, 464 8th St; Cafe Lyon, 5701 College Ave; Green Apple, 3943 Piedmont Ave; and in San Francisco at Power Source Café, 81 Fremont St. More info: Lev's Original Kombucha, levsoriginal.com.

Photograph: above by Serena Bartlett, below by Cheryl Koehler