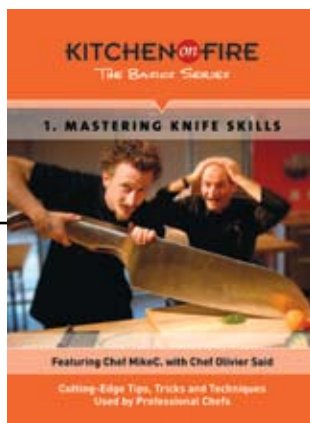


NOTABLE EDIBLES



Sharpen Up Your Skills

For years, my kitchen has held an object that I took to be a knife sharpener. It was my great-grandfather's, and as he lived in Nebraska and had a large family, I've imagined him flourishing a carving knife across it in preparation for slicing through the evening's roast beef or ham. Sadly, though I am a dedicated home cook, I had never taken this tool out of the square hole in my knife block and used it, daydreams of Omaha aside, because I never knew what to do with it.

That is, until I watched "Mastering Knife Skills," a charming DVD featuring the madmen of Berkeley's Kitchen on Fire cooking school, Chef MikeC and Chef Olivier Said. The first lesson I learned was that my knife sharpener is in fact a honing tool, useful for both angling the blade and making microscopic serrations. But even more helpful was learning about all those other things in my knife block and finding out what cutting tools I need if I really want to call myself a dedicated home cook: These

guys tell me it's the paring knife, the serrated knife, and the chef knife that are most important.

While the chefs are serious in their objectives—efficiency, ease, and safety while using knives—they are rarely dull. For example, Chef MikeC's demonstration on proper grips and cutting positions and motions is repeatedly interspersed with a clip of an exuberant and French-accented Chef Olivier saying "zee claw" (which refers to the position of the non-knife-holding hand). Later, while discussing the physics of cutting and chopping—streamlining techniques and vocabulary that you can use to cut anything—Chef MikeC insists you "need to yell at your garlic" to best crush it.

Get set to be amply entertained while you learn how to set up your work station and slice a tomato right—"Mastering Knife Skills" is a sure bet to sharpen up your knives, your skills, and your wit right along with them.

—Elinor Hutton

Got Stuff?

Did you ever think about why we all have so much stuff? Or have you thought about the environmental impact of all that manufacturing? This might be the time to start doing something about it, but if that sounds like too much for the moment, sit down, relax, and stroll on over to www.storyofstuff.com. There you'll be treated to a short, fun, easy-watching, and completely eye-opening 20 minutes of documentary filmmaking called *The Story of Stuff*.

"Stuff" is written and narrated by the engaging Annie Leonard, a local gal who's an expert in international sustainability and environmental health issues. She's spent a lot of time investigating the world's factories and dumps, and then sharing her knowledge with organizations worldwide looking to educate people about the impact of consumerism and materialism on global economies and international health.

The documentary concisely presents the history, direction, and repercussions of our material-based economy, exposing where our "stuff" comes from, how and why it is made, the impacts of the whole process of getting it to us, and what happens to it when we discard it.

Ms. Leonard's most effective points are illuminated by the quantitative facts that she presents. For example, "ninety-nine



percent of the stuff we harvest, mine, process, transport—ninety-nine percent of the stuff we run through this system is trashed within six months." "For every one garbage can of waste you put out on the curb, seventy garbage cans of waste were made upstream just to make the junk in that one garbage can you put out on the curb."

What are the alternatives? Green and closed-loop production, zero-waste initiatives, renewable energy research, are what she talks about, but she says that she could make another whole movie on those subjects. Luckily for us, the film's website offers a wealth of information, contacts, and links that detail the power each individual has and the ways in which one can make change happen before we use up the planet. So be sure to watch *The Story of Stuff*, share it with everyone you know, including as many kids as possible, since they're the ones who will live with the consequences if we don't heed the call to action.

—Elinor Hutton

Into the Woods

For a year now, residents of Oakland's Rockridge district have been adoring their newest restaurant, Wood Tavern, for its lively ambience and inspired bistro menu. This fall, however, diners may have found that the Tavern, at 6317 College Ave., got a little woodier (and more local).

It happened one afternoon, when Rhonda Wood (no relation) of Livermore's Wood Family Vineyards stopped in to lunch with her friends. They ordered the Tavern's fabulous Crispy Pork Belly salad, several bowls of the wicked good Wicked Good Seafood Stew, and one sinful Pulled Pork Sandwich. To



Rhonda Wood in the Raboli Vineyard

wash everything down, they opened some Wood Family wines: the voluptuous "Para Mas Amigas" 2005 Chardonnay, the supple "One Oak Vineyard" 2004 Merlot, and the sublime "Raboli Vineyard" 2005 Old Vine Zinfandel.

It was not long before Tavern owner Rich Wood stopped by to see what the merry band was doing with all those bottles open. He was offered tastes, and right there on the spot, he ordered several cases of the Merlot to serve at the restaurant.

Like many of Livermore's wineries, the Wood Family operation makes a very limited amount of each variety and vintage: 224 cases of this particular Chardonnay, 211 cases of the Merlot, and a mere 99 cases of the Old Vine Zinfandel (this zin was one of the top 10 winners at *Tri Valley* magazine's third annual Livermore Valley Wine Competition, and now it's entirely sold out), so the likelihood of being served one of these wines in Rockridge is pretty slim.

To learn more about Wood Family Vineyards, go to www.woodfamilyvineyards.com. For more on other up-and-coming Livermore wineries, turn to the article on page 24 of this magazine.

—Cheryl Koehler

Eating Tea Leaves

When I was new to town, I was surprised to find a common thread running through an otherwise diverse assortment of new contacts; the love for Burmese food. Months later, I'm with them, and in particular, I'm hooked on *Lephet Thoke*, a salad made of fermented tea leaves. The favorite place to get it seems to be Burma Superstar, which is located way out in San Francisco's Richmond district. Fortunately, I've found two Burmese restaurants in the East Bay that serve the salad: Nan Yang, in Oakland, a long-time favorite, and newcomer Bagan, in Alameda. Bagan turns out to be part of the Burma Superstar empire, but, best of all, you don't need the coveted cell phone number of the hostess to get in—at least for now.

On the off chance that there are still two or three of you in the area new to the cuisine of Burma (also known as Myanmar), I can tell you that the components are familiar to any consumer of Southeast Asian food, but the combination of ingredients and methods of cooking result in a unique taste. With Myanmar's long coastline, seafood is often the protein of choice in the rich, spice-filled curries, and fish sauce and dried shrimp are elemental to the salty, savory flavors. Myanmar's proximity to India shows in the long-grain rice (sometimes enriched with coconut milk and fried shallots, or raisins and nuts), in the samusas (crispy pastries filled with potatoes or other veg-



etables), and in a layered, fried bread called platha, delicious for sopping up curries. China's influence is seen in the appearance of both wheat and rice noodles, used in distinctively un-Chinese preparations: mild, coconut-sweetened dishes with chicken and yellow peas, garlic-sauced noodles, or delicate fish soups. The region's spice trade is readily apparent in the wokked stirfries, which often incorporate whole spices as well as aromatic ingredients like garlic, chilis, and fresh mint.

But the exemplary dish in Burmese cuisine must be the fermented tea leaf salad. It achieves the ultimate balance of fresh, sour, hot, and salty flavors by employing a veritable list of typically Burmese ingredients: pickled green tea leaves, pickled ginger, fried split peas, sesame seeds, peanuts, tofu, dried shrimp, tomatoes, herbs, papaya, dried chili powder, noodles, tamarind paste, garlic oil, and the ever-present, ever-important, crispy fried garlic slices. These are often presented as separate elements, with contrasting piles of color and texture to be mixed at the last moment. The result is addictive, so I expect I'll be running into you a few times at Bagan.

—Elinor Hutton

Nan Yang
6048 College Ave., Oakland
510.655.3298

Bagan
1345 Park St., Alameda
510.522.6200

Photo: Fairtrade Labelling International