

SOUL FOOD » THE MUSIC AND MENUS OF MC MYSTIC

# Roger Mooking's champagne dreams

With a new Food Network show, the former Bass Is Base drummer aims to build on his kitchen successes at Kultura and Nyood

BY LIZ WALKER

When is a CD not just a CD? When it crosses over into cookbook territory, offering recipes for a sensual meal of oysters, champagne and fettuccine or songs referencing cocktails at a certain hip restaurant such as, say, Queen West's Nyood.

This is the soon-to-be released *Soul Food*, from star chef Roger Mooking, who also happens to have been MC Mystic in a local band of fleeting fame, Bass Is Base.

"I might be a synaesthete," the 33-year-old says, laughing. "Instead of thinking of mediums as separate entities, I really find the common ground in all mediums."

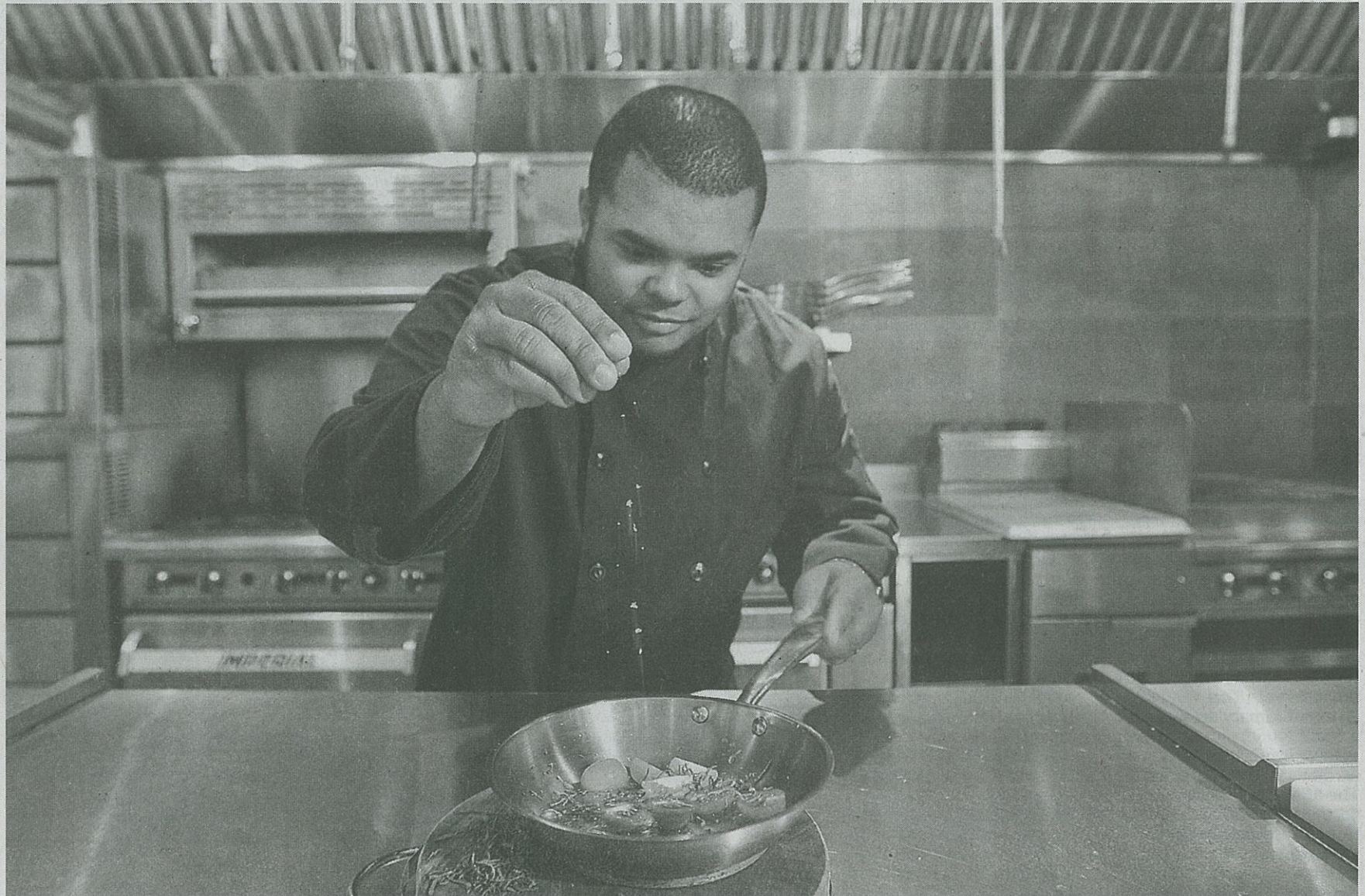
The former rapper – now global-fusion guru – seems to be everywhere at once this season. In addition to his job as executive chef at Nyood (where the cherry pork roulade is already a legend among downtown diners) and King East's ultra-chic Kultura, he's also launching a new TV show on the Food Network called *Everyday Exotic*. And he's caring for a brand-new infant daughter.

"I am tired. It's brutal," he says. "We shoot the TV show at 6:30 in the morning until 7 or 8 at night and then I gotta be at the restaurants."

Despite the fatigue, Mr. Mooking has a cheeky smile that lights up his eyes. "To be honest, I'm A.D.D.!" he says, jokingly referring to attention-deficit disorder. "I'm A.D.D. about music, about food!"

A compactly built man with impish features, Mr. Mooking was born in Trinidad to a Chinese immigrant family. They moved to Edmonton and opened a Chinese-Caribbean restaurant, where he started wrapping wontons as a child. He worked in the family business as a teenager, squirrelling away money to pay for trips to the recording studio.

He had fallen in love with funk, soul and hip hop, transforming himself into MC Mys-



'Perogies, roti and dim sum is "everyday" for me,' says Mr. Mooking, whose new Food Network show *Everyday Exotic* debuts in October. CHARLA JONES/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

tic, when he relocated to Toronto to form Bass Is Base with Ivana Santilli and Chin Injeti. They scored a hit in 1994 with *Funkmobile* from the Juno-winning album *First Impression for the Bottom Jigglers*.

But the kitchen beckoned. "It was in my blood to become a chef. It's part of my lifeline."

Mr. Mooking says his inspiration begins with ingredients. For him, that can mean fresh fruit or crackly vinyl records.

"There's a commonality in everything," he says. "Because

of that, I realize if I'm making a song or a menu item I go through the exact same thought process. What does this song need? It needs tension and release. It needs dynamics. And I need all those things for a menu item!"

After inspiration comes well-honed technique. Mr. Mooking attended George Brown, where he added classical French training to his arsenal. "A French chef would tell you, 'Don't roll [boil vigorously] the stock when you're cook-

ing.' And then the Chinese chef I worked with for years told me, 'Roll the stock! You wanna roll it and make it boil!' There's no right or wrong way. It's just whatever you are trying to accomplish."

*Everyday Exotic*, which debuts in October, will bridge the gap between ethnic food and standard North American dishes.

Forget the purists: The show is for viewers who peruse cookbooks longingly but feel intimidated by exotic ingredi-

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ents. Don't just think mangoes, think mangosteens. "[The show will] teach people how to shop for it. How to know if it's good. How much you should be paying. How to use it when you bring it home."

Mr. Mooking wants audiences to push their own boundaries. His idea of comfort food draws upon his multicultural childhood. "Perogies, roti and dim sum is 'everyday' for me."

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