

By Lindsay Groves

# Food, music and the good life

FOR ROGER MOOKING, THE HITS KEEP COMING

If success is measured by popular acclaim, then by all accounts Roger Mooking should have peaked by now. How dare he keep on racking up accomplishments?

The man with the golden touch, Chef Mooking presides over Queen Street West's sizzling-hot restaurant-lounge Nyood, which has barely had an empty seat since opening nine months ago. Along with his partner Hanif Harji, he also runs King Street East's hip Kultura. What's more, the duo plans to open a third restaurant in the next year.

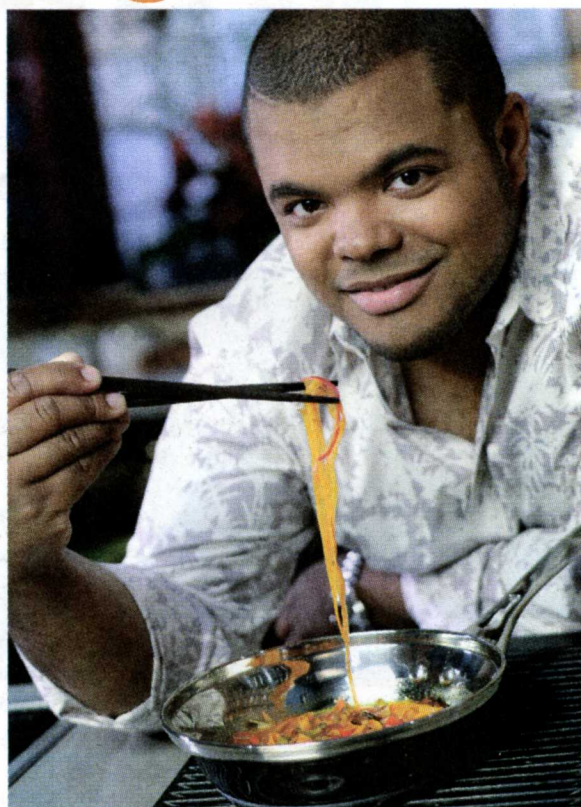
Mooking also produces and hosts a new series on the Food Network called *Everyday Exotic*, and just dropped his first official solo album, *Soul Food*. Wait there's more: he's got a wife, 16-month-old daughter and a brand new baby girl at home. So what drives him to keep on making things, and making things happen? "I want to create something that I will be proud to show my children when they grow up."

The third generation of his family to be in the food and beverage industry, Roger was born in Trinidad and later moved to Edmonton with his family. A pro chef since he was 14, he used his earnings to finance his music career and found success as a member of the popular R&B trio Bass is Base back in the 1990s. When the group disbanded, he went back to his roots and donned his whites. "It's in my blood," he says. He enrolled at George Brown, graduated in 2001 with top honours and went on to work at several Toronto restaurants including Barrio Lounge, Verveine and Epic. He now holds a position on the advisory committee for George Brown's culinary program.

His accessibly exotic cuisine has garnered much critical acclaim. "Just by osmosis you pick up so many things," he says, discussing an eclectic range of influences. His cosmopolitan style employs colourful ingredients from all corners of the globe. Mooking's "no-borders" approach to the reinterpretation and reinvention of food results in gorgeous combinations such as Nyood's lychee ceviche with prawn, cucumber, pickled chili and fennel milk. At Kultura, a menu highlight is a playful version of a classic like the orzo paella with tandoor shrimp, saffron, clams and chorizo sausage.

Each episode of his new show, *Everyday Exotic*, highlights an "obedient ingredient" ranging from papaya and lychee to nori and Chinese five-spice. His food is about accents, judiciously applied. "I think simplicity stands the test of time."

With the *Soul Food* CD, Mooking maintains his unifying approach to food, music and life. It comes packaged with a recipe book. The project was based on the principle that music and food are both forms of nourishment—"one feeds the body, the other the soul." It's a pretty tasty approach. **CB**



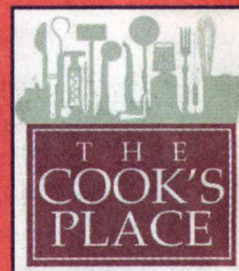
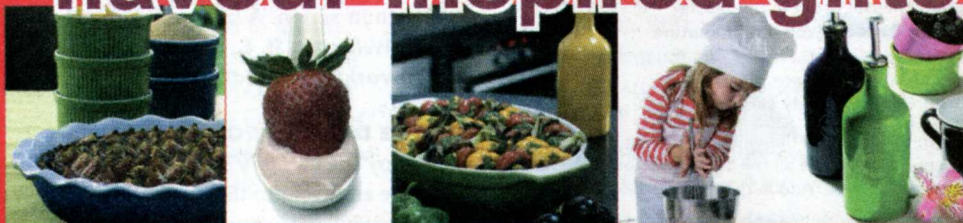
Mooking, the hardest working man in the chow business.

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We're giving away 10 singles from Roger Mooking's new CD, *Umeus*. To enter, just email [info@citybites.ca](mailto:info@citybites.ca) and put "Umeus" in the subject line. Include your mailing address and phone number. We will draw winners on Nov. 15. Meantime, check out recipes, giveaways and have a listen to some tunes at [rogermooking.com](http://rogermooking.com). And catch *Everyday Exotic* Thursdays at 12:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. and Sundays at 11a.m. and 7:30 p.m. on the Food Network.

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