

food by *susan catto*

A flair for the exotic

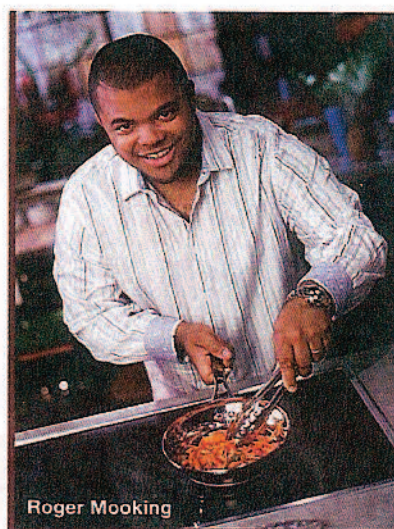
Roger Mooking brings spice to everyday life with a brand-new show

At first glance, the set of Roger Mooking's new Food Network Canada show, *Everyday Exotic*, doesn't look too different from any other studio kitchen. It boasts the gleaming counters where Roger shows viewers how to use unusual ingredients, the stainless-steel stove where he whips up meals and an enviable array of spices laid out in glass-fronted drawers. But surrounding the cooking space, clues to the host's unique background start to appear.

There's a guitar on a stand, for one thing, and a Juno Award perched on a shelf. For al-

though the 34-year-old has a thriving career as a chef and television host, cooking is actually his second career. In his late teens and throughout his 20s, Roger, who was born in Trinidad and raised in Edmonton, was better known for making music – as MC Mystic, lead singer of the successful R&B band Bass Is Base – than food. Today, he is using the lessons learned from that first stint in the spotlight to shine once more, this time in the artistic realm of the chef.

Roger comes from three generations of restaurateurs. His grandfather, originally from



Roger Mooking

China, moved to Trinidad and subsequently opened several Chinese restaurants and bakeries. His father took over the family business, then launched his own Chinese-Caribbean restaurant in Edmonton, where the family moved to when Roger was five. "I grew up understanding how to use a cleaver and how the kitchen

Cucumber lychee salad

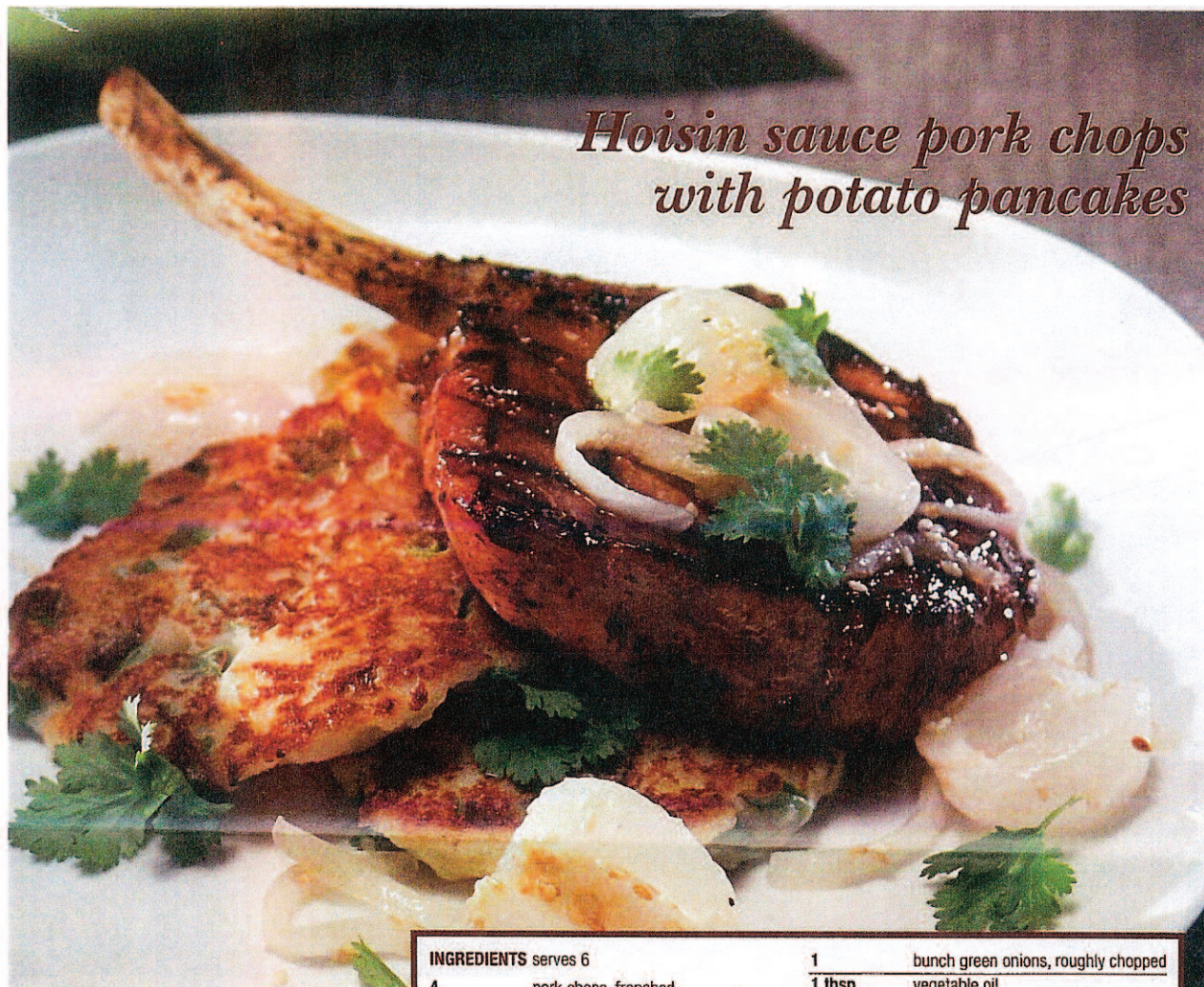
INGREDIENTS serves 6

1	English cucumber
1 cup	lychees, peeled, pitted and halved
3 stems	cilantro, finely chopped and leaves picked (reserved for garnish)
2	red Thai chilies, pith and seeds removed and finely diced
	zest and juice of 2 limes

1 tsp	sugar
1 tbsp	seasoned rice-wine vinegar
	salt

- 1 Cut cucumber in half length-wise, deseed with a spoon, quarter and dice ¼-inch thick.
- 2 In a bowl, mix cucumber, lychees, cilantro stems and chili.
- 3 Add lime zest, juice, sugar, salt and vinegar, toss.
- 4 Before serving, garnish with cilantro leaves.





Hoisin sauce pork chops with potato pancakes

works in a Chinese restaurant, which is very different from a French restaurant," says Roger. Traditional Caribbean cooking and the humble flavours of his Edmonton neighbours also played a role in shaping his culinary vision. "At home, I was surrounded by roti and pigtail and pilou and plantain, and then I'd go to my friends' houses and have perogies and cabbage rolls," he recalls.

By the time he was 14, Roger was cooking at diners and truck stops, and spending every dollar he earned in the recording studio. He knew he wanted to be a chef someday, but in the '90s his plans took an irresistible detour when his band, Bass Is Base, stormed the Canadian music charts. Roger sang onstage with James Brown at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, made videos for singles such as "Funkmobile" and "I Cry" and won the Juno for best R&B/Soul Recording. "The music side took over my life for a while," he says.

But Roger remained keenly interested in cooking, and when he dismantled his band, he enrolled in the culinary arts program at Toronto's George Brown College, graduating in 2001 at the top of his class. He went on to ever-more significant jobs at hotels and restaurants, eventually hooking up with his current business partners to open the Toronto hot spots Kultura and Nyood. As executive chef, Roger specializes in simple, intensely flavoured "small plate" cuisine

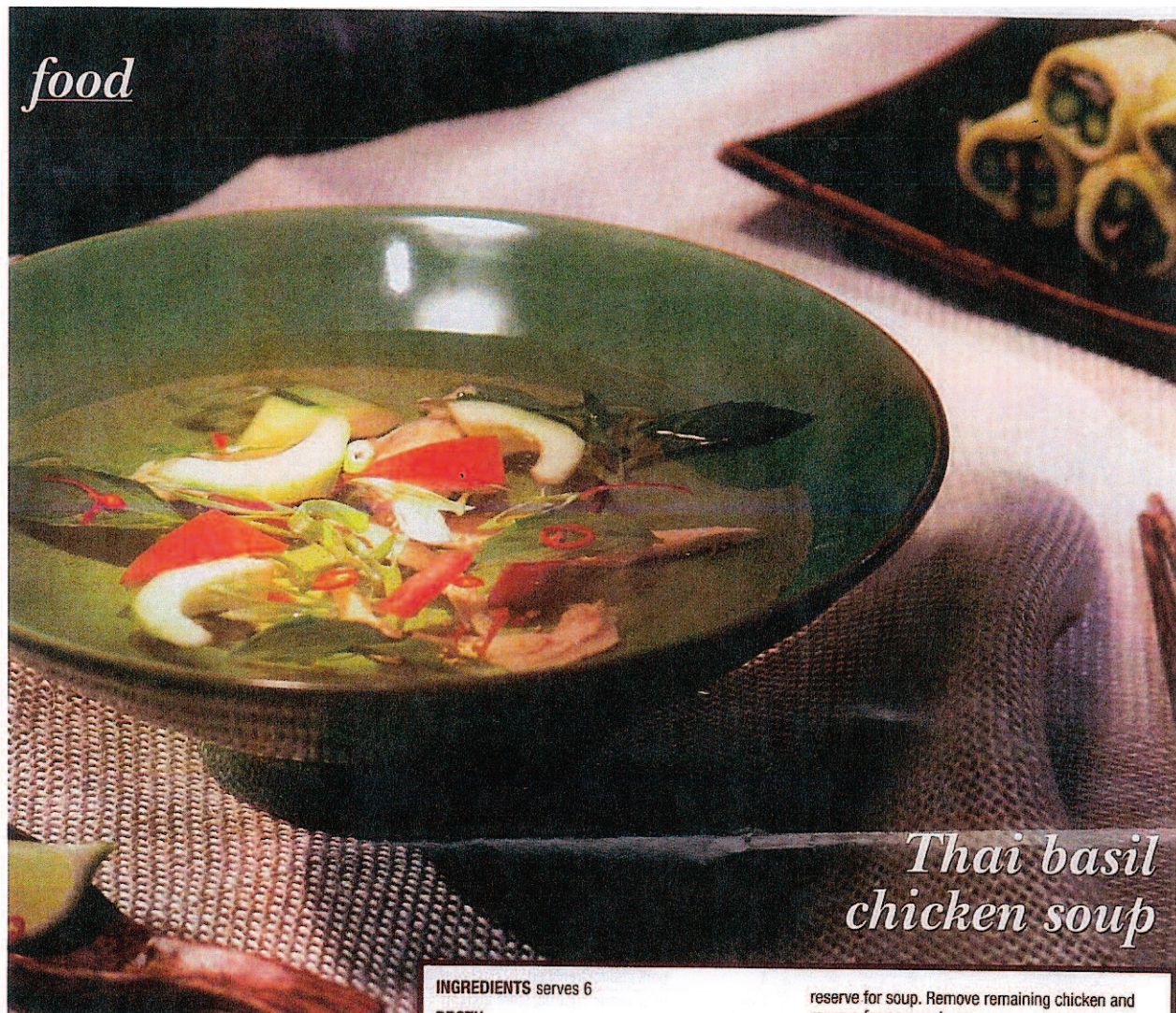
INGREDIENTS serves 6		
4	pork chops, frenched	1 bunch green onions, roughly chopped
1 cup	hoisin sauce (jarred, store bought)	1 tbsp vegetable oil
		1 tbsp butter
		salt
		pepper
<p>1 Marinate pork chops in ½ cup of hoisin sauce for half an hour.</p> <p>2 Heat grill; grill pork chops, turning and basting with remaining hoisin sauce on each side until cooked through; approximately 15-20 minutes.</p>		
POTATO PANCAKES		
1	egg	1 Preheat oven to 350° F. In a bowl, beat egg and ½ cup of milk. Then add flour and mix well.
1 cup	2% milk	2 Add garlic powder, salt and pepper, then other ½ cup of milk and mix well.
½ cup	all-purpose flour	3 Incorporate mashed potato and mix well, then add green onion and incorporate into the mixture.
2 tsp	garlic powder	4 Heat vegetable oil in a frying pan over medium to high heat. Once pan is hot, spoon mixture in pan forming 4 pancakes. Add butter to pan.
5	loose cups of chunky mashed potato (using 5 peeled potatoes; preferably Yukon Gold)	5 Flatten pancakes for even cooking, cook for 4 minutes, then flip. Place pan in oven for 5 minutes until potato pancakes are brown and cooked through.

with influences as diverse and unique as his own background and training. To Roger, his evolution as a chef is similar to his evolution as a musician. "In the early years, you spend a lot of time emulating, picking up little tricks from other people. As you become a little more mature, you start to formulate your own voice and style."

Roger first caught the eye of Food Network producers several years ago when he worked at a restaurant close to their headquarters. Even-

tually he and the producers developed the concept of *Everyday Exotic*, which familiarizes viewers with ingredients that may be unknown or intimidating to the uninitiated. "It's not focused on one culture," explains Roger. "We do everything from lychees to schnitzel."

Despite his background as a performer, getting in front of the camera felt different this time around. "I've always been in a band setting, so standing on a set all by myself and talking ►



Thai basil chicken soup

down the gun of a camera as if it were a viewer was very challenging—probably the hardest thing I've done in my life," he says. Other aspects of his move to television have come more easily. "A lot of chefs can cook. That's a prerequisite. But they might not know how to market and position themselves, how to handle an interview or deal with photographers. I was very fortunate to have had all that experience previously to bring to the game," he explains.

And while *Everyday Exotic*, which started airing earlier this month, is sure to increase his fan base, Roger is unlikely to let fame go to his head. For one thing, he has a wife and two daughters under the age of two to keep him grounded. "I was career focused for so many years, building my music career and my restaurant career, but it pales in comparison to having kids," he says. Roger still keeps a hand in the music business: he recently released the album *Soul Food*, which comes with a booklet of recipes and wine pairings. "I wanted to make something that encompassed the sensibility of the palate as well as where I am as a recording artist," he says. So expect Roger to continue bringing the public his personal combination of music and cooking—two of life's most enjoyable pursuits. **M**

INGREDIENTS serves 6

BROTH

1	whole chicken (2½-3 lb)
1	stalk celery, cut in half
1	medium carrot, peeled and cut in half
1	medium onion, skin removed and cut in half
1	stalk lemongrass, bruised
¾ lb	shiitake mushrooms, stems and caps separated (reserve caps for other use)
1 bunch	Thai basil stems and leaves
1 tbsp	ginger, smashed
1	red Thai chili, split (seeded if no heat is desired)
	peel of 1 lime
1 tbsp	black peppercorns
2	bay leaves

- 1 Place all ingredients in a large pot. Cover with cold water, approximately 2-2½ quarts.
- 2 Bring up to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer, uncovered.
- 3 Skim top, removing impurities throughout cooking process.
- 4 Cook for 1 hour at a low simmer. Remove chicken from pot. Remove leg meat, pull into pieces and

reserve for soup. Remove remaining chicken and reserve for personal use.
5 Strain stock into a clean pot.

TO MAKE SOUP

	broth
	red finger chili (optional)
¼ cup	fish sauce
1½ tbsp	sugar
	juice of 2 limes
	chicken leg meat, from stock
½	cucumber, peeled, seeded and sliced
4	plum tomatoes, quartered, seeded and cut into ½-inch triangles
1 bunch	green onion, chopped
1 tsp	sesame oil
1	lime, cut into quarters
	Thai basil stem and leaves
	salt

- 1 Bring broth to a boil.
- 2 Add chili, fish sauce, sugar and lime juice.
- 3 Season with salt.
- 4 Add pulled chicken meat, cucumber and tomato.
- 5 Serve soup, piping hot, garnish with green onion, sesame oil, quartered lime and Thai basil.