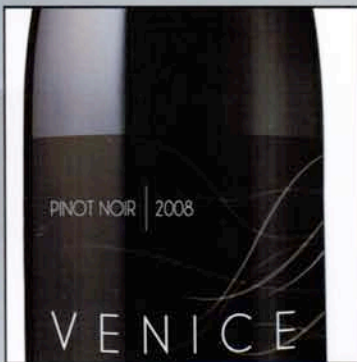
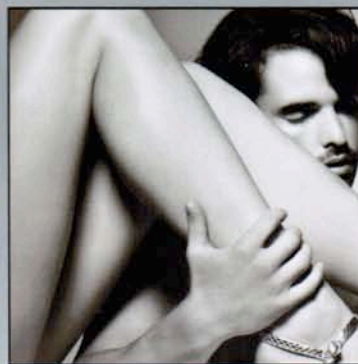
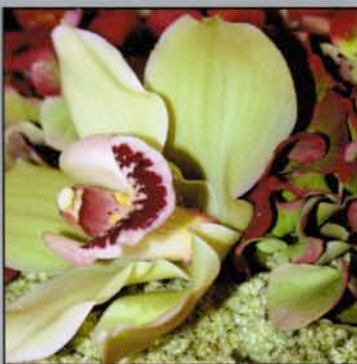


VIE

Life, Leisure & Style



GIFT GIVING & WINTER LIVING



Roger Mooking, Kultura and Me
By Ziggy Lorenc

"Fire And Famine burn the Spirit"
*Roger Mooking

It's been a long and mundane month. By day I prod and poke at punctuation— crossing items off lists. I pass my nights on the couch with a pack of highlighters and a pack of post-it flags, wearing a wool blanket and Christmas gag socks. I fall asleep on the subway. This time of year has me too tired to cook, so I've taken to watching the *Food Channel* on mute and eating *Kraft Dinner*.

I deserve something like a dashing Frenchman beating down my door or at least a wonderful glass of wine courtesy of an exquisite dinner, soulfully prepared. Dear readers, sometimes the universe answers the call, and sometimes it's *Vie Magazine*.

Dispatched by Publisher Brigitte Lamblot to *Kultura Restaurant* on King St., I was a shadowy black-clad, *slightly deranged-looking* visitor ogling at the gate. The master, Executive Chef Roger Mooking was alerted, and the first brandy was served as I was seated at a private table.

With kind eyes and a gentle grin, the *Upland Cress Salad* was presented and fed to this sad and hungry bird by the Chefs own hand. Oh, the divinely delicate water-

cross, a perfect sliver of heritage beet, then, a black fig, all draped in a gentle white balsamic—what woman would not be impressed? And how did Mooking even intuit that I had eyed the Mushroom Orecchiette with such longing? "Feed the depressed woman the pasta immediately" he ordered, "with Malivoire Pinot Noir Pear Chutney and Aged Cheddar! Do make sure to dribble it with Truffle Oil and don't be stingy baby." With a swish of a spoonful of real macaroni and cheese, all my gray days evaporated as the lovely male server made a Mojito appear before me like a young Houdini.

To spend time with Chef Mooking is to take fusion cooking seriously. The man takes you on a culinary journey to a complex and yet simple place. Spending seven hours sampling his repertoire, a feast so varied, that Brigitte, her premiere model Tasmien and I could not possibly dine through the entire menu in one evening. There are eighteen choices to share and the ability to consume more variety of foods in one sitting, than if we had decided to eat our way along the entirety of King Street—which we have been known to do.

Now, I would have been happy with just the Beef Tenderloin. And if I offended anyone that night murmuring 'MMMMMM...MOOOOOKING' while enjoying the buttery tenderness of a perfect piece of meat, I am sorry. The beef is a must have although the Miso Black Cod was just as fabulous. The fish melted in our mouths with just the slightest detection of crystallized Tamarind—and remember, I watch Mooking on The Food Channel and even with the mute button, I know that Tamarind is one of his 'obedient ingredients'.

There were the *Chicken Samosas*—each wrapped like a prize package with *Asiago, Sage, and Spiced Apple Gari Chutney*. The marveling over the tiny fried Daikon (baby fried onions). The complexity of *Rice Crunch, Yuzu Corn Puree* and *Potato Foam*—each dish on the menu has at least five imaginative ingredients impressively chosen, the flavours well balanced with a West Indian influence. I didn't get to know Mooking *that* well—he is one busy man about to head off to a his new restaurant in Burlington, [Eatalia] but after so many hours of indulgence I became completely aware that Mooking's intelligent choice of combinations exhibits the flair of a true artiste. Someone who's *Tuna Roll* is not just a roll, whose Naan tastes like a crêpe.

The accompanying wines and liqueurs were going right to my head, exactly where I wanted them to go, so I felt like dancing. *Kultura* is not a discothèque I might add, but the staff indulged me. I had just grabbed Tamsen by the wrist and spun her around once or twice in a 1970's hustle, when I was gently prodded to try dessert. I believe I even asked Chef Mooking if I could be his stylist for his television show *Everyday Exotic*. I wanted to dress him up in leotards, a huge M on his chest and a cape—my culinary super-hero!

I never dreamed I'd finish off the evening having a *West Indian Beignet*, but I did. I ate them all with the tiny dishes of *chocolate dipping sauce* and what appeared and tasted like an *apricot purée*. And even if I was tipsy, I was sober enough to make sure that Brigitte and Tamsen ate the *espresso mousse* so that I could finish up the tiny donuts all to myself. They did. Mission Accomplished!

So here I am back at home on the couch, listening to your latest music CD. I've discovered that you are as talented a musician as you are a star chef. *Soul Food* [Warner] is the name of Roger Mooking's album, where he muses about passion, food and music, in wonderfully similar ways. In several instances one imagines that the music inspired the food, or is it the reverse? It is interesting that in the album insert, the innovative artist includes wine pairings with his songs. Musical imbibing—how clever!

Thank you Chef Mooking; you have *spoiled* me for life! Dining in Toronto will never be the same. If I've been over-the-top Chef, I can't help it—because I do love great food. I beg of you; please invite me to your new restaurant opening?

P.S. Can Brigitte and Tamsen come along too?

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