

Burmese Cuisine Comes to Orinda

Chef William Lue and Orinda's Theodore Wang open The Refined Palate

By Susie Iventosch



Burmese Coconut Chicken Noodle Soup Photo Susie Iventosch

A few weeks ago I was treated to a crash course in Burmese cuisine by chef William Lue, co-owner of The Refined Palate in Orinda. Apparently, Burmese cooking is heavily influenced by neighboring countries China and India, and some of the key ingredients are kafir lime leaves, lemon grass, fish or shrimp paste and chilies. One of the most celebrated

Burmese dishes is the tea leaf salad. "Lots of countries drink tea, but very few actually eat the tea leaves," Lue said.

He pointed out the differences between the ceremonial and regular versions of Burmese Tea Leaf Salad. The ceremonial version of the dish is comprised of a variety of nuts and seeds and special tea leaves imported from

Burma. The tea leaves, carefully selected for their tenderness, are boiled for five minutes and then fermented for several weeks in a clay jar. During this process, they develop a certain tanginess. The salad is then tossed at the table in lemon juice and garnished with dried shrimp, fresh garlic and chilies. Lue said that he or his servers offer an explanation of the ingredients and the tradition while tossing the salad.

"When you take a bite of this salad, it feels like the ingredients are dancing on your tongue," Lue said. "It is a multi-dimensional dish with different textures, flavors and spiciness."

The regular tea leaf salad is more substantial and bulky, including cabbage, lettuce and tomatoes in addition to the ceremonial salad ingredients. This salad is tossed with fish sauce.

The special tea leaves used in these salads are difficult to find, but Lue imports them and will sell them to customers. Still, I thought it would be fun to have a recipe with more commonly available ingredients, so he offered to share his recipe for another traditional Burmese dish: Ono KauSwe, a coconut-chicken noodle soup. The recipe below is based upon

Lue's description of how he makes it, but because he has been making the dish for so many years he doesn't really measure quantities. So, I had to wing it a little bit. We were quite pleased with the results, but I am certainly anxious to try his version at The Refined Palate!

Lue hails from a family of chefs. Both of his parents were in the restaurant business, as were all of his siblings, at some point in their lives. Lue has been starting and operating restaurants since 1971, but he has a unique business model. Because he immigrated to the United States when he was just 14 years old, speaking not a word of English, he has a special interest in helping others in the same situation. So, he helps young chefs, who've recently arrived to the states, by starting restaurants, pulling permits and licenses, and setting these chefs up in fully operating restaurants. He mentors them and when they are ready, they can buy the restaurant from Lue and take off on their own. He then moves on to the next project. He has started more than 20 restaurants over the years.

The Refined Palate is owned by

Lue and his good friend, Theodore Wang of Orinda. Lue said they both enjoy good food and thought why not introduce Burmese cuisine to Orinda? This way people won't have to travel to San Francisco, where there are a lot of Burmese restaurants. Lue and Wang have employed an interesting concept of using a set of rotating chefs, two at a time, to see who is the best fit for the restaurant and who is better suited for the busy lunch rush and who is a better fit for the more relaxed dinner crowd. Sort of like their version of the Next Great Chef Contest!

This is a great time for locals to sample a variety of Burmese chef creations, all in one location!

The Refined Palate
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Open Monday through Saturday
Lunch, 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m.
Dinner, 5-9 p.m.

Ono KauSwe

(Burmese coconut-chicken noodle soup)

INGREDIENTS (quantities are give or take, depending upon your personal taste)

- 4-5 cups chicken, cooked and cut into bite-sized pieces
- 3-4 large yellow onions
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Peanut or canola oil
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh ginger root
- 1 teaspoon curry paste (Lue says any color ... I used red)
- 1 teaspoon powdered turmeric
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 2-4 cups chicken stock (depends how thick you like it)
- 2 cups cooked lentils or garbanzo beans (to thicken soup)
- 1 can coconut milk (I used low fat)
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- 1 package wheat noodles (Lue prefers fettuccine), cooked al dente

Garnish options

- Toasted sliced garlic or shallot
- Sliced raw red onion
- Boiled egg, chopped (optional)
- Cilantro leaves (optional)
- Yellow lentil fritters (recipe below)

DIRECTIONS

Heat oil in large soup pot and cook onion and garlic until tender and translucent. Add ginger root, curry paste, turmeric and paprika. Mix well. Add chicken stock, cooked lentils and coconut milk. Season with fish sauce. (Be careful it is very salty, so taste soup as you add it.) Add cooked chicken. Heat for a few minutes and serve over cooked noodles. Sprinkle with garnishes. (I let the soup simmer on low heat for about an hour before serving, and when we had it for lunch the next day, the flavors were even better!)

Yellow Lentil Fritters*

- 1 cup dry yellow lentils (I used red lentils), cooked according to directions
- 2-3 tablespoons flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Peanut or canola oil

Mix cooked lentils with flour and salt. Heat oil in pan and pour batter into 4-inch rounds. Cook fritters until crispy on both sides. Crumble and serve as garnish in soup.

*Chef Lue said that he has perfected the yellow lentil fritters and thought it best for people to come in to try his. I gave it a whirl, and I really loved them ... even as a snack!

Susie Iventosch is the author of Tax Bites and Tasty Morsels, which can be found at Across the Way in Moraga, www.amazon.com, and www.taxbites.net. Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com.

This recipe can be found on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.



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"Mr. Peabody & Sherman"

By Derek Zemrak



Photo courtesy DreamWorks

Many of you will remember this television cartoon from the late 1950s and early '60s, about a genius Nobel Peace Prize-winning dog and his adopted son, Sherman. Mr. Peabody is voiced by Emmy recipient, Ty Burrell ("Modern Family") and the young, talented actor, Max Charles, voices Sherman. You may remember Charles from the 2012 movies "The Three Stooges" and "The Amazing Spider-Man" or the television series "The Neighbors." He is one to watch as his career continues to rise.

In this film version of "Mr. Peabody," he has built the ultimate time travel machine – the WABAC and all is going well until the day Sherman takes the controls to impress his crush, Penny. Things go haywire and Sherman rips a hole in the universe. Now it's up to Mr. Peabody to save the day! Mr. Peabody must face his biggest chal-

lenge in life – being a parent.

Director Rob Minkoff also directed several family films including "The Lion King," "Stuart Little," "Stuart Little 2" and "The Haunted Mansion." The movie is rated PG with a TRT (total running time) of 1 hour and 30 minutes.

It is great to see high-quality children's films being released so early in the year – first "The Lego Movie" and now "Mr. Peabody & Sherman." In past years, children's movies were not released until late May, usually around Memorial Day weekend, so take advantage of this opportunity and enjoy "Mr. Peabody & Sherman" with the family.

Derek Zemrak is a film critic, film producer and founder of the California Independent Film Festival. You can follow Derek on Twitter @zemrak for the latest Hollywood news. Derek can be heard every Friday on KAHN 950AM on the Poppoff Show.

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