

FASHION LIFESTYLE ART ENTERTAINMENT

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DECEMBER 2006

FREE

**Rubbing You
The Right Way**
**May Your Flute
Bubbleth Over**
**Flavors That
Transport You**
**Breaking
Down Walls**
**In Touch
With Destiny**

yellowmags.com

Jacket by Jerry Tam for FORM
Bracelet by Luc Kieffer

Photographer : **Jhane Hoang**
Fashion Stylist/Art Director : **MarcSifuentes.com**
Hair/Makeup : **Nany Yanira**
Illustrator : **Arianna Stolt**
Model : **Diana Moffit@Ikon Models**



As the year comes to a close, we looked back and see how much *Yellow Magazine* has evolved. Our mission has always been a simple one: to be involved in the community in every aspect, and to bring the Asian American community to the mainstream. As you have turned the pages of *Yellow Magazine* every month, you probably noticed that we were at every important community event, and consistently interviewed interesting people – both local and national – who make a difference. We promise to continue along this path in the coming year.

We would like to offer our heartfelt appreciation to all of our readers who welcome us into their lives, and to the various organizations that greet *Yellow Magazine* with open arms. May your holidays be happy and safe.

Viet Hoang
Publisher



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The color yellow has played a recurrent symbolic role throughout the history of Asian culture. It symbolizes the earth that sustains all life, yet has been embraced by Buddhist monks as an expression of unchallenged power. Such is the role of yellow: always revered but in different ways under different circumstances.

The mission of *Yellow Magazine* is to introduce our readers to the artistic, fashion, lifestyle and entertainment contributions made by Asian Americans. It is our hope that the depth and breadth of the topics and events we cover do justice to the pride that the color yellow has represented throughout the millennia. As the publisher of the *Yellow Magazine*, my last name is Hoang, which also means yellow. Just as I am proud of my name, I am proud of my heritage, and proud of *Yellow Magazine*.

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Yellow Magazine November Issue Party & "Shop for Hope"

Held at RD Enterprises Sample Sale

Photos by Sopheavy Than

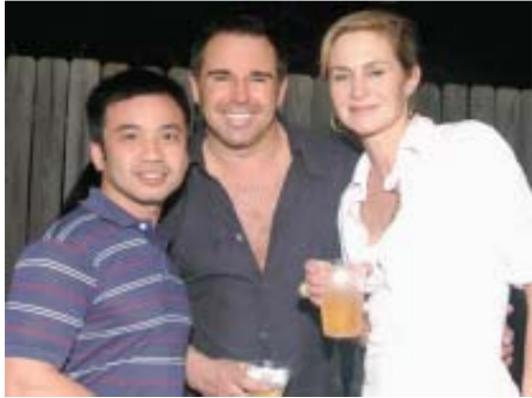
Yellow Magazine readers by the hundreds came out to celebrate the November Issue and to support Hope Initiative, a local non-profit charity organization that helps support orphanages in Vietnam. The party was part of a special, invitation-only pre-sale shopping event, from which a percentage of sales were donated to Hope Initiative by Bryan Downey of RD Enterprises. Guests sipped on Moët & Chandon White Star Champagne and drank Tiger Beer, newly imported from Singapore.



Junho Lee, Bonny Maynard, Andy Phan



Lily Hsu, Teresa Tran



Viet Hoang, Bryan Downey, Cathy Echols



Anh Nguyen, Su Le



Kevin Yu, Michael Dang



Dominic Tran, Tu Dao



Sonja Kramer, Tina Zulu



Melissa Lara, Laura Le



Christopher Mendel, Shannon Hall



Richard Aguilar, Karen Lara



Fatema Naqvi, Julie Vo



Brandon Nguyen, Angelia Guinara



Sarah Jones, Chris Goins



Mark Dang, Summer Valente



Mikaela Reynolds, Stratis Catacalos



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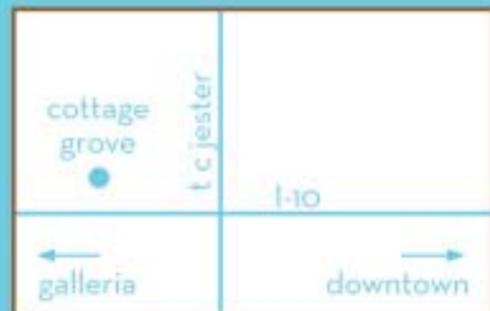


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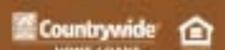
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Breaking Down Walls with Siman Tu by MARC SIFUENTES



Designer Siman Tu

Ever since Siman Tu established his company in 1989, discriminating collectors of haute couture and luxury accessories the world over have sought his designs. His creations are available at finer specialty stores and couture houses such as Oscar De La Renta, Halston, Pamela Dennis, Mary Jane Denzer and Vera Wang and have adorned such celebrities as Raquel Welch, Mary J. Blige, Geena Davis and Catherine Zeta-Jones, among others.

When did you decide to get into the fashion business and was jewelry your first choice?

Actually, I was studying to become a clinical engineer in Taiwan but I grew bored and sought a more creative field. I decided that I wanted to be in the fashion business, so I found a job in a high-end store. Later, I started arranging window displays for the store and then took a job at a modeling agency assisting models with their personal styles. The agency put on a fashion show that was so plain, I felt compelled to accessorize each outfit. At my own expense, I bought supplies to make earrings and necklaces for 110 unique runway ensembles. After the show, many people approached me to ask about the jewelry. This is when I decided to become a jewelry designer.

How did you develop your own line?

Within a year, word of mouth about my jewelry spread to some of Taiwan's top designers. I began creating jewelry for several of them and for celebrities during those years.

When did you decide to come to the United States?

People in Taiwan started telling me that my jewelry was too expensive. They kept asking me why it was more expensive than Christian Dior. They didn't understand that those big designers were mass producing their jewelry. I could spend two days making a one-of-a-kind piece of jewelry. So, I decided to take a two month long trip to America and Europe to get a better idea of the quality and prices of jewelry available in those countries. I felt challenged to compete in those markets with the successful jewelry designers who were thriving there.

You have a huge showroom in the middle of New York's garment district. How long did it take you to get established?

I started my company in a Brooklyn basement apartment. Basically, I put money back into the business for the first seven years. When I started, I didn't speak English. So, it took a little longer to develop contacts at trade shows and customers because of the language barrier.

Was there ever a time when you were so discouraged that you thought of just running back to Taiwan?

No, I stayed because I felt like I was breaking down walls as long as I continued to stay in business with each passing year. I wanted to be taken seriously by the trade show buyers. It wasn't long before the specialty stores started buying my jewelry. It was perfect for their customers because making custom made jewelry is like making a couture gown. Sometimes a piece of jewelry can take days to make. Only specialty stores have the kind of clients who understand that kind of quality.

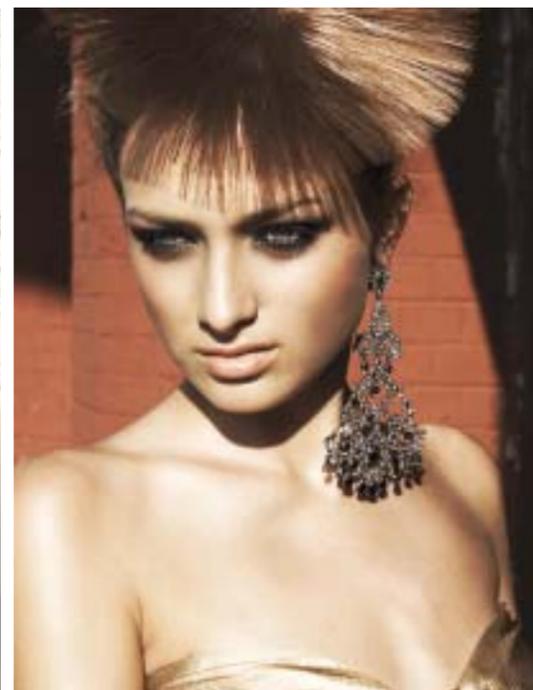
What was one of the most detailed jewelry pieces you have made?

I made a jeweled dress for a very famous singer in my country. It required thousands of crystals applied by hand. I labored for twelve hours a day for about seven days. Then, it took another three days to make all the adjustments after she came it for a fitting.

Do you think there is a specific type of woman attracted to your jewelry?

My jewelry has a very loud personality. It is best suited for strong women such as interior designers and stylists who exude confidence and who want to be noticed.

Visit simantu.com for more information.



All jewelry by Siman Tu | Photography by thomaslohr.com | Fashion Stylist - Marc Sifuentes
Hair - Seiji Yamader@japerm.com | Make up- Jani | Model - Claudia Demian@vision nyc

You've had trunk shows in Houston. What do you think of Texas women?

I love Texans. When I first came to America, I found New Yorkers unfriendly, unlike Texans who always made me feel so comfortable. Texans always allowed me to be myself and to feel more relaxed. Plus, back home, the image of America was that of Texas.

What do you see as the biggest transition in your designs during your career?

I don't think it has changed too much. Maybe 18 years ago the pieces were more dramatic in size. My designs reflected classical influences. I was inspired by the antiques I found at auctions. In 2000, I expanded my evening jewelry line to include semi-precious stones. My regular evening jewelry customers wanted me to design pieces that they could wear during the day. For a long time, I avoided such jewelry because I always thought that they must show a lot of metal. Then, I experimented with a few pieces that placed more emphasis on semi-precious stones. They sold very well and eventually developed into a full line.

When you start designing a piece, do you think about the stones first or the design?

For semi-precious stones I think of color first. Then I will see what kind of necklines are in style on the runway shows in Europe to determine the draping on the neck.

Where do you get most of the stones?

From all around the world. My suppliers know what I like and call me when they have stones they think I might want. If I find a unique stone, I will buy every piece to make sure no one else will be using it in their designs.

You've designed jewelry for some major design houses like Oscar de la Renta and Vera Wang. How did that collaboration develop?

Mostly, by word of mouth. I was well trained in Taiwan because I worked with so many celebrities who wanted jewelry made in two days. There is no time to change or redesign anything. I had done this for so many years that when I came to the U.S., I was able to quickly determine what the client wanted. They would show me their fabrics and some sketches. I studied their previous collections and then met with them to review the current collection that they had already started. From that point, I had about a week to design jewelry for the entire line.

What do you want people to think when they are buying a Siman Tu original?

When people buy Siman Tu, they know it's handmade and "one of a kind". They know that the jewelry is not mass-produced or something pulled out of inventory. It's all about having a quality product. We pay attention to the details of each piece to assure that the customer is acquiring the best product possible. I personally approve every piece that leaves the showroom.

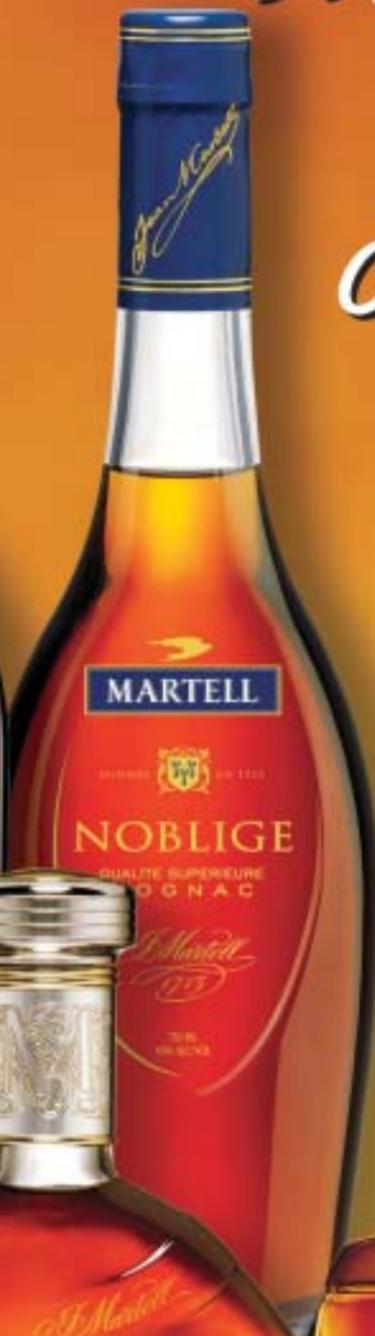
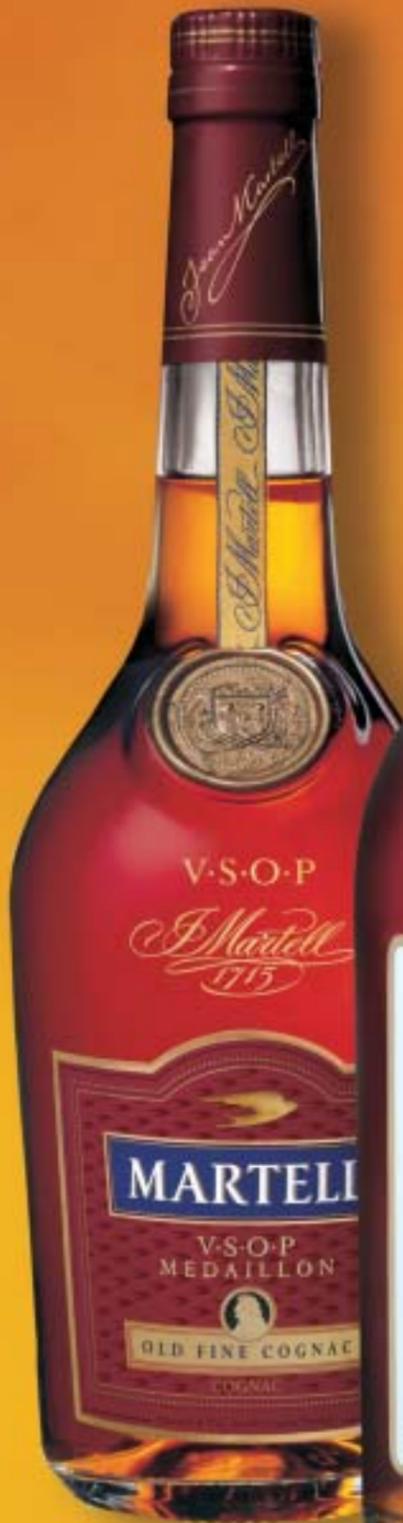




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Rockets Mixer featuring Yao Ming

Held at Yao Restaurant

Rockets fans had a chance to meet Yao Ming at the Rockets Mixer hosted by Miya Shay and Tom Griffin. The Mixer was to promote season ticket sales for the 2006-2007 Rockets season.

Photos by Sopheavy Than



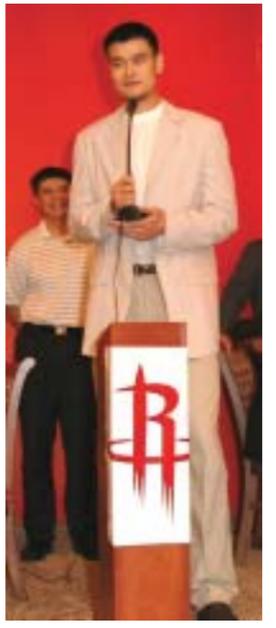
Seliece Caldwell, Tom Griffin, Miya Shay



George Gee



Sun An, Yuki Rogers



Yao Ming



Houston Rockets CEO Tad Brown



Barry Warner, Xinsu Wang



Robert Lee, Sue Feng



H.B. Hsu, Danielle Lu



Miya Shay, Anna Kong, Mini Timmaraju

Gordon Quan: This Is Your Life!

Held at Kim Son Restaurant

Gordon Quan's family and hundreds of close friends and fans attended a dinner at Kim Son on November 1, 2006, to celebrate his life and career. The dinner event raised over \$15,000 for one of Gordon's favorite charity organizations the Coalition For The Homeless.

Photos by Sopheavy Than



Gordon Quan, family and friends



Sheila Lee Jackson, Gordon and Sylvia Quan



Wanda Choi, Beverly Gor, David Quan



Kim Szeto, Nancy Liu



Glen Gondo, William Chung, Cecil Fong, Lewis Yee



Mandy Kao, Betty Gee



Irene and Jack Joe

City Bank Texas Grand Opening

Held at the new City Bank

Many business owners in the surrounding areas came to welcome City Bank Texas to the community on October 26. The recently opened new branch at 9750 Bellaire Blvd. will offer commercial, real estate and residential lending.

Photos by Sopheavy Than



Jonathan Le, Ball Lee



Cory Newsom, Charla Brown, My-Lien



The ribbon cutting ceremony



Ken and Linda Chang, Mandy and William Kao



Dr. Hoang, Jin-Li Zhao, Liem Dang, Tiffany La



Joseph Neri, Ronald Le



My-Lien, Suzie Liner, Miner Liner, Jennie Hodack



Andrea La, Michelle, Tommy Vo and friend



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Smooth Notes for
the Holidays

May Your Flute Bubbleth Over

by PHILIP
CUSIMANO

With the New Year soon upon us, our focus shifts to sparkling wines. I have always marveled at how retail shelves and floor displays are crowded with bottles of sparkling wine on December 30th but come January 2nd those spaces are vacant. Even people who refrain from drinking alcoholic beverages throughout the year will toast the New Year with a glass of sparkling wine.

Let's start with some simple basics (emphasis on "simple"). Sparkling wine is table wine that is fermented

Good bubbly can be rich,
luscious, creamy and
uniquely toasty.

twice. During the fermentation process, the sugar chemically transforms into alcohol. It is a natural process and, in this case, grape juice is converted to wine. Fermentation can also be induced by adding yeasts and sugar to the mix.

When a still wine is fermented a second time, it becomes a sparkling wine. The manner by which the second fermentation is induced affects the end product's

quality and price. The technique that produces the highest quality is called "Methode Champenoise" in which fermentation occurs within the bottle. It is an exacting process that requires skill, labor and time. The method includes laying individual bottles neck down and manually rotating them over an extended period of time. Sparkling wines produced in this manner generally state "Methode Champenoise" somewhere on the label and is a reliable indicator of its pedigree.

Originally, all sparkling wine was referred to as "Champagne", regardless of its origin. Over time, it was decided that that designation be reserved for only those wines that actually were produced in the province of Champagne located about 90 miles from Paris. Sparkling wines from America are simply referred to as sparkling wines. Italian versions are referred to as Spumante, and Spanish ones are known as Cava.

Most sparkling wines are a blend of grapes, the driest of which are called Brut. Good bubbly can be rich, luscious, creamy and uniquely toasty. Although it helps define special occasions, it also complements most foods and is, therefore, an appropriate choice for meals.



So let's lift up our flutes and toast the New Year!

Veuve Clicquot Brut Yellow Label

This great Champagne house traces its roots to the late 1700's when under the leadership of the Widow (Veuve) Clicquot, a standard of excellence was established that endures today. One of America's most popular Champagnes, this cuvee always delivers quality consistent with its reputation. A blend of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and a touch of Pinot Meunier sourced from fifty different crus (primarily of Grand and Premier classifications), produces a Brut that fills the mouth with rich flavors of cream and toast with a full bodied wave of elegant balance. Think of style and finesse. \$37.00

Schramsberg Blanc de Blanc

This remarkable sparkling wine house hails from the Napa Valley. Blanc de Blanc was first produced in 1965 by Jack and Jaime Davies and is a blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Blanco. This cuvee is decadently elegant. It is dry and crisp with rich cream and toast in a velvety steel balance. This particular sparkling wine first gained international recognition when President Nixon brought it to China on his historic visit to Beijing and offered a "Toast to Peace" with Premier Chou En-Lai. All of Schramsberg's cuvees are produced utilizing the Methode Champenoise. \$32.50

Gruet Blanc de Noirs, non vintage

This is an excellent sparkling wine from New Mexico and it is also a terrific value. Gruet was first planted in 1984 by Gilbert Gruet of the French champagne house Gruet Fils located in Bethon, France. Today, the winery is operated by the Gruet family utilizing the Methode Champenoise. This cuvee is a blend of juice from primarily Pinot Noir. The wine is salmon in color with red berry fruit flavors in a rich body of toast and cream. We can certainly all salute the price. \$11.50

Wines available at Spec's Wines, Spirits, & Finer Foods, various locations. Visit speconline.com for the store nearest you.

A Combination
of Colors

White

WHITE is a dynamic and versatile exhibition featuring artists living and working on four continents. The exhibition runs December 1-30, 2006.

When one thinks of white, images of fresh linen, clouds, baby powder, purity, solitude, and reflection come to mind. The Anya Tish Gallery is featuring an exhibition entitled WHITE, dedicated to the expressive potential of this color. Each piece in the exhibit explores the variations, moods, and possibilities of white – which is really a combination of all the colors in the spectrum. The exhibit includes the painting, sculptures, and installations of the following international and regional artists: Jason Brown, William Cannings, Lalla Essaydi, Orna Fenstein, George Grochocki, Andreas Kock, Leszek Lewandowski, Elena Lopez- Poirot, Wyatt Nash, Mckay Otto, Charlotte Smith, Yasunori Ueda, Maxim Wakultschik, and Oleg Yanushevsky all are represented.

Japanese artist, Yasunori Ueda, has created installations formed from masking tape. The effect generates a sensation of movement similar to that of water. Other highlights include Leszek Lewandowski's light sculptures, Elena Lopez-Poirot's kinetic walk-in installation pieces, and haunting portraits of Arab women dressed in draped white fabric and adorned with hennaed Arabic calligraphy from Moroccan born artist Lalla Essaydi.

The Anya Tish Gallery hours are Tuesday-Friday 10:00 AM-6:00PM and Saturdays 11:00AM-5:00PM. The Gallery's phone number is 713-524-2299, and it is located at 4411 Montrose, Houston, TX, 77006.

Converting Territories #41
Lalla Essaydi



White Landscape 0305
Yasunori Ueda

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Ruffle skirt by Betsey Johnson, worn as a top
Necklace by Luc Kieffer

Photography - Jhane Hoang
Illustrations - Arianna Stolt
Fashion Stylist/Art Director - MarcSifuentes.com
Make-up/Hair - Nany Yanira
Model - Diana Moffitt @ Ikon Models



Silk capelet by Joanna Mastroianni
Dress by Jerry Tam for Form
Jeans by Levi's
Crystal necklace by Nadri
Boots by Karine Arabian



Brocade halter dress by Chloe Dao for LOT 8
Beaded capelet by Joanna Mastroianni
Boots by Karine Arabian



Dress by Tashia London
Feather bolero by Izzy Camilleri
Crystal cuff bracelet by Philippe Audibert

Flavors That Will
Transport You

Sorrento Ristorante

by HENRI MERCERON

Have you ever gone somewhere and had the sensation that you had been instantly transported to a different place or time? Have you ever caught yourself saying something along the lines of, “I don’t feel like I am in Houston”? It is not an experience that I often have, but when I do, it is almost like having an out of body experience. I get a warm and fuzzy feeling and an overwhelming sense of calm envelops me. Well, by now, you either can relate to what I am describing or you may feel that I need to be committed to a psychiatric ward. If you fall into the first category, you will appreciate the sense that overcame me once I passed through the doors of Sorrento Ristorante; if you are part of the second group, before you call the authorities to haul me away, I encourage you to experience Sorrento and, perhaps, you will better appreciate the sense of comfort of which I speak. If the ambiance does not transport you to Southern Italy, the savory flavors certainly will. Either way, buckle up. You are about to travel first class.



Proprietor Abbas Hussein

Located on lower Westheimer in the Montrose area, the exterior of the restaurant is fairly inconspicuous, occupying the corner spot of a pleasant looking strip shopping center. In the entrance, guests can gather at a richly appointed circular bar to enjoy a glass of wine while waiting for the rest of their party to arrive. Situated at one side of the bar is a sparkling ebony black baby grand piano, where a pianist perfectly accents the romantic mood every Tuesday through Saturday evening, and on Sunday afternoons.

The restaurant is designed in such a manner that while you are indoors, you feel like you are outdoors. Although I have never been there, I felt as though I was in Sorrento...Italy, that is. The central dining room is surrounded by three distinct dining areas that are perfect for parties of various sizes. On nights when no private parties are scheduled, The Fireplace Room, Wine Room and enclosed patio have individual tables for open seating. The owners of Sorrento have put much thought into creating an environment that preserves a quaint and flexible setting that is suitable for romantic dinners as well as festive parties.

All of the details that create the mood and environment within Sorrento have resulted from years of experience and observation. Originally from Afghanistan, proprietor Abbas Hussein has been cooking since he was eight years old. He developed relationships with American pen pals while in school and later immigrated to the U.S. to pursue higher education. A self taught chef, Abbas has spent his entire life in the restaurant business, with many of those years spent managing restaurants on lower Westheimer, close to where Sorrento now resides. Over those years, he amassed a database of ideas that he planned to use someday to design and operate his own dining establishment. When his son went to college, Abbas decided that the time had arrived. His partner in the business is the restaurant’s architect, and the pride of ownership really shows. When you dine at Sorrento, it is impossible not to settle comfortably into the ambiance: white linen tablecloths, simple dark wooden chairs, and elegant window treatments. There are fresh orchids in tall thin vases on every table. Even taller vases hold an array of eighteen inch rustic looking breadsticks encrusted with dark and light sesame seeds. A grilled clove of garlic rests in a pool of seasoned olive oil.

Do not assume that I have emphasized Sorrento’s atmosphere to overshadow its menu. Not so. Just as the right frame enhances a painting and a sumptuous dish is enhanced by its presentation, a restaurant’s ambiance is a significant factor in making the entire dining experience as good as it can be.

My appetizer (or should I say, “antipasti”) was the seared Hudson Valley foie gras with poached pear, gorgonzola and wilted arugula. This combination is a marriage that should never end in divorce. The dominant flavor is the foie gras, followed by the gorgonzola and balanced by the sweetness of the pear and the slight bitterness of the arugula. The presentation is picture

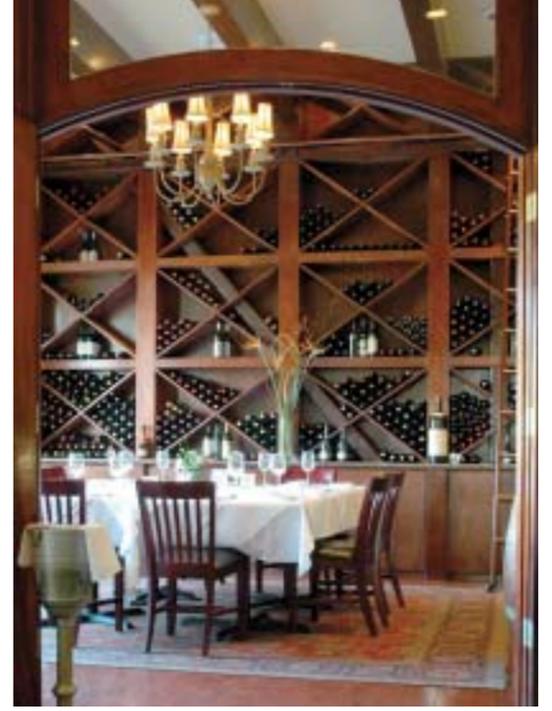


Above: Seared Hudson Valley foie gras
Below: Veal osso buco with stone ground herbed polenta



Sorrento Ristorante is located at 415 Westheimer. For reservations, call 713.527.0609. Lunch is served Monday-Friday 11:00am-5:00pm, and dinner is served Monday-Saturday 5:00pm-11:00pm. Sunday hours are 11:00am-10:00pm.

sorrentohouston.com



Photos by Sopheavy Than

perfect, although my first attempt to cut through all the layers at once quickly changed all that. While I felt defeated by my inability to neatly consume this tidy item, the combined flavors left me wanting for more. A lot more.

My first course (“primi piatti”) was a wild mushroom and sage raviolo with creminis and white truffle oil. As a writer and editor, the first thing I noticed when ordering was what I thought was a typo – ravioli was misspelled. Abbas assured me that I was about to taste a raviolo and not ravioli. I never realized that ravioli is plural for raviolo. Well, now I know and, in fact, that is exactly what I received – a single raviolo, albeit a large one. And it was stuffed with two of my favorite things, mushrooms and truffle oil. The flavor of truffle oil is hard to describe since it is so unique. The best adjective I can come up with is “earthy”. A truffle is actually a fungus that is harvested at certain times of the year. They are expensive because they are hard to find; white truffles run about \$500 per pound and black ones are \$2,000 per pound. Pigs and specially trained dogs sniff out truffles where they grow. Dogs are preferred because pigs like to eat the truffles once found.

My second course (“secondi piatti”) is one of Sorrento’s most popular “comfort” foods that customers travel many miles to order, and is the perfect item when you do not know what you feel like eating. The veal osso buco with stone ground herbed polenta is a large portion of a quintessential Italian meal. The overriding flavors are that of the meat that is so tender it literally falls off the bone, and the mounds of cooked chopped tomatoes that cover it. The shank bone is presented upright with a narrow scooping spoon sticking out of the marrow. This menu item offers a much more basic flavor palate than the previous ones. I would have tried the marrow but, frankly, I forgot. Also, I wanted to save room for the homemade tiramisu with rum and chocolate.

The dining experience at Sorrento is one of unparalleled calm and serenity.

It has been said that Sorrento’s tiramisu is the best in town. Actually, I had the pleasure of tasting it on a previous trip, and it is superb. But in the interest of sharing something new with you, I tried the limoncello panna cotta with raspberry sauce. Basically, it is a lemon custard that is infused with limoncello and dusted with crushed biscotti. True limoncello is a vodka liquor made with lemons from Sorrento, Italy. The dessert is very light and flavorful with a consistency of firm flan. It was the perfect way to finish a meal so abundant in fresh and bold flavors.

As a final note, the dining experience at Sorrento is one of unparalleled calm and serenity. The piano music is subtle and complements the serene and relaxed atmosphere that Abbas has created for his guests. Upon entering the restaurant you are greeted by one of the pleasant people who seem to emerge from nowhere. The entire operation flows like a symphony of well rehearsed instruments. In fact, those instruments that are always working behind the scenes are employees who Abbas has known for years. He has known the chef for eighteen years and has known the waiters for eight to ten years. There is a sense of family. There is a sense of tradition. There is a sense that you are no longer in Houston, Texas. You are in Sorrento. Enjoy the mood. Enjoy the food. Buon Appetito!!

55th Annual Consular Ball

Held at the Intercontinental Hotel

The 55th Annual Consular Ball was held October 28, 2006, at the Intercontinental Hotel. The event honored Israel and Houston's Consular Corps, and benefited international education through the Houston Junior Chamber of Commerce Foundation.



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Yoshihiko Kamo, Consul General of Japan, and Etsuko Kamo



Marine Corps



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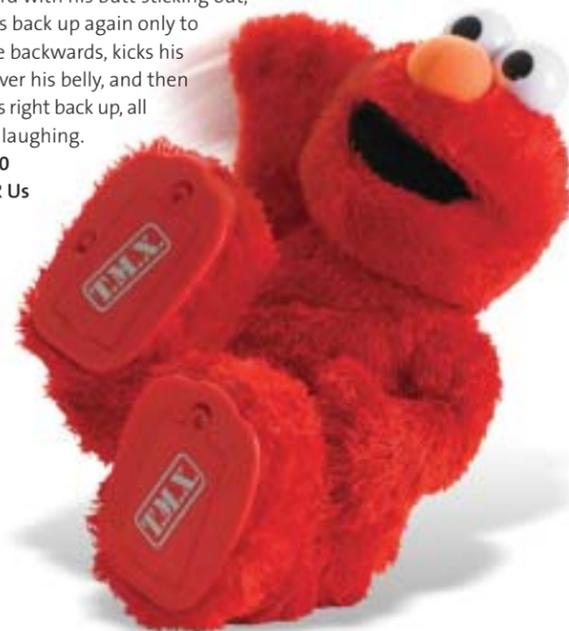
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Held at the Derek Hotel

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Photos by Sopheavy Than



Lawrence Nguyen, Jennifer Lee



Jenny Sheu, Jennifer Wang



Michelle Fong, Kevin Yu, Teresa Mai



Jean and Summer Valente



Mark Dang, Heidi Cheung



Ginny and Cy Lo



Brandon Nguyen, Jin Lee, Lily Hsu



Thomas and Sandy Green



Allan Whitney, Lisa Valentine



Angelia Guinara, Dr. Nellie Grose, Minmay Liang



Jenny Shen, James Scott Wallace

Asian American Business Council VIP Dinner and Fundraiser

Held at Kim Son Restaurant

Business leaders attended the AABC VIP dinner on October 18, 2006, to raise money to beautify and support the New Chinatown area on Bellaire Blvd. The dinner was a huge success, with \$105,000 raised during the evening.

Photos by Sopheavy Than



Mandy and William Kao



James and Leeshan Birney, Julie Lin



Sally Shih



Donnie Chang, Jimmy Chang



Tommy Vo, David Tai, Kenneth Li



Henry Li, Walter Tjon, David Tai, Kenneth Li



Grace Kuo, Jennifer Liu, Robert Lai



Group photo at the event

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Rubbing You
the Right Way

Bali: A True Tropical Paradise

by MATT SIMS



Bali is a place that conjures up images of an idyllic paradise. A place where women in sarongs carry baskets piled high with fruit and other offerings to the gods down narrow lanes between terraced rice paddies. A place where tan, lean bodies glide on the surf towards expansive beaches several miles long. These images are more than what you would find on postcards and in tourist brochures. In fact, they fairly represent much of what you will see in Bali.

Arriving on the island just before dusk, I was treated to my first of many dazzling sunsets. I planned to divide my time between the beaches and resorts of the southern coast, and the villages and hills of the interior. Since the airport is located close to the ocean, I first headed to Kuta, the liveliest part of the coast. I checked into the Alum Kul Kul Resort and Spa, a very pleasant boutique renowned for its wonderful treatments and serene garden setting. It is across the street from a quiet stretch of beach and close to the middle of Bali's fast paced shopping and nightlife district. Further south, a number of five-star hotels monopolize sections of the coast. Although they offer the best in luxury and privacy, they seem removed from the real life of the island.

One of the first things you may want to do in Bali after a long plane ride is to get a massage. The Balinese take the art of massage seriously, and appreciate its health benefits associated with stress reduction and improved circulation. In fact, massage is considered an integral part of Balinese family life; they start receiving them soon after birth and give them as soon as they are able to do so. The spa at the Alum Kul Kul is one of the best and offers a variety of relaxing treatments. Many are based on traditional herbal treatments, and one, the mandi lulur body scrub, is based on a centuries-old Javanese palace ritual.

As soon as I entered the garden courtyard, I walked beneath a thatched roof to a private open-air treatment room where the music of the traditional Balinese gamelan was playing softly in the background. The therapist began by washing my feet in a small basin of water filled with flower petals. I found myself wondering if this was what it felt like to be a king in ancient times. The massage was almost two hours of top-to-toe muscle-pulverizing deep tissue heaven. Each finger and toe got its own little massage. Nothing was rushed or hurried. Eventually, all sense of time was lost and I felt like my body was transformed. That must be why the Balinese always look so serene and calm. After a mudpack

Religion, art, nature, and tradition are inextricably bound in Bali

rubdown and exfoliation, the therapist drew me a warm bath filled with flowers that soaked away what little consciousness I had

remaining. The two small cookies and the cup of ginger water she left for me just added to my contentment. Later, after I had dried off and returned to the massage table, I called her in to administer the final skin polishing rubdown. By the time I finally walked out of the spa and away from the fading sound of the gamelan music, I was already planning my next visit.

Completely relaxed, I came upon the Hard Rock Hotel bar, which was full of tourists enjoying a local band belting out hits by everyone from Christina Aguilera to Van Halen. Not far away were other clubs that catered to different tastes in music and were patronized in various degrees by locals and tourists. Most featured live music and were aimed at the casual after-surf crowd. One place, the Karma Sutra Club, featured a nationally-known Indonesian pop group that attracted a huge crowd of young, affluent fans from all over the country, some of whom arrived

in limousines and looked as if they were ready for a "red carpet" entrance. Confirming what I had heard, the Kuta area is a nonstop party location.

I thought it would be more fun to rub elbows with a slightly more hip, upscale crowd, so I took a taxi to the nearby area of Seminyak where the crowds don't appear until after 11:00pm, and DJs spin dance music until sunrise. In this area, everyone speaks English, but you'll hear accents from all over the world and meet people from other Indonesian islands such as Java and Sumatra. Most of the tourists are Australian, but Europeans flock here, as well. If you stay out really late, the normally ubiquitous taxis will have vanished, but you can always get a ride back to your hotel from an unlicensed motorbike taxi for about \$2. It was a wild ride back in darkness to Alum Kul Kul through the alleys and empty streets, but the motorbike driver got me there faster than a taxi.

Don't get the idea that Bali is strictly a partying paradise. Just as many, if not more, people come to this tropical island to get in touch with their spiritual side. Bali is the only one of more than 18,000 Indonesian islands where Hinduism is still the dominant religion. The majority of the population continues to observe ancient rituals and often worships at outdoor stone temples and shrines. Religion, art, nature, and tradition are inextricably bound in Bali like nowhere else in the world. After sampling the shopping and nightlife of the resort and beach areas for a couple of days, I was anxious to get into the countryside and experience this unique culture.

For those seeking a peaceful vacation or to connect with nature, the village of Ubud is the place to start. This small township, high upon green hills, is the spiritual heart of Bali, and the people show their reverence and devotion to nature and the gods in many ways. Each morning on the street outside my guesthouse, I observed people quietly placing offerings of artfully arranged food and flowers near doorways, on stone statues, and in courtyards. Sometimes you will see long lines of women carrying these offerings in tall arrangements deftly balanced on their heads as they take part in one of the many religious festivals, which are frequently observed. This is the Bali I had read about: peaceful, serene, and full of traditions.

Traditional Balinese music and dance are popular forms of religious storytelling, and many dance performances are held in various locations throughout the area nightly. Some of these involve professional performers and large groups of musicians. Many others are held in friendly neighborhood temples, performed by the same artisans, store clerks, and other people you may have met on the street hours earlier. The best performance I saw was by a local neighborhood association at an outdoor temple. It was the Kecak Fire and Trance dance, a combination of several ritual dances accompanied by the mesmerizing sound of about 100 men chanting. In these performances, it is believed that the dancer enters a trance in order to communicate with the gods.

Without notice, the lights were turned off and only the flames burning on a five-foot tall candelabrum remained in the middle of the floor. Just as suddenly, a group of chanting, shirtless men in black and white checkered sarongs with red sashes burst into the area. Their eyes bulged with excitement and they fluttered their outstretched hands back and forth just inches away from our faces. The effect was terrifying. After a few moments of choreographed confusion, they all quickly sat down in a circle as the light from the fire cast strange shadows upon their bodies and the chanting grew steadier. Though seated, they moved their bodies in rhythm to the chanting. Two female dancers emerged in shiny costumes and began a slow and graceful dance that told the story of a person being transformed into a deer to lure away a prince so that a demon king could capture his princess. This was followed by a dance in which two young

Photos by Matt Sims





girls received purification and then danced in a quickly paced style waving fans and tilting their heads in perfect rhythm with their eyes closed. Their movements perfectly mirrored one another. At times, the girls would lay down as if they were going to sleep only to be roused by two women who would sit them up and start them dancing again. The combination of the unusual chanting and the intense dancing by the dim light of the fire was captivating. Their trance was ended by the prayers of a priest who blessed them with holy water.

The last dance was performed by a young man in a trance who behaved like a wild horse and danced on a fire made of burning coconut husks. As abruptly as it had begun, the dance was over. The large group of men began shaking their arms and hands again, ceremoniously backing out the temple, conveying the impression of a film being played in reverse.

The next day, I was invited to go on a half-day white water rafting trip with some new friends I met at the guesthouse. We entered the Sungai Ayung river, which flows swiftly down an impossibly green valley past beautiful waterfalls and numerous Class III rapids. All along the way, our small four-person raft nimbly dodged rocks and low wooden bridges while we paddled and splashed our way down the river on a seemingly non-stop thrill ride. My face hurt from smiling so much. Occasionally, the thick jungle would yield to an amazingly beautiful landscape consisting of a terraced hillside lined with coconut trees. I have been on many rafting trips, but this was by far the prettiest place I'd ever floated past. It was also interesting to observe how the local people lived along the river. We saw men crossing narrow bamboo bridges while carrying enormous loads, and families washing their clothes while children played nearby. At the end of the ride, we hiked to the top of the valley, showered, and ate traditional Balinese food while overlooking the rice paddies. I was ready to do it all over again.

Back in Ubud, I made arrangements to attend a traditional Balinese

feast at Ketut's Place, a local family run guesthouse. Ketut gives occasional tours of his family compound and explains much about Balinese life and traditions, such as naming all of one's children in order of their birth either Wayan, Madi, Nyoman, or Ketut, no matter what their gender. In larger families, the names are repeated. At dinner, we sat in the traditional style, on pillows at a low table. The food was incredible and consisted of many shredded meat and vegetable dishes with a number of ingredients and spices I couldn't identify. Most dishes contained some combination of rice, coconut, cassava, water spinach, or beans spiced by tumeric and chilis.

Early the next morning I found myself hiking up the 10,308 foot Gunung Agung, the island's tallest and, thankfully, dormant volcano. I was with a new mountain guide who kept losing the trail in the predawn darkness. After negotiating some intimidating steep rocky sections, we made it to the highest point in time to see the sun rise. While my guide made an offering to the gods, I snapped photos of the pyramid-shaped shadow cast by the volcano. I thought about that day in 1963 when it last erupted killing thousands of people. My guide assured me that it was safe ever since a water buffalo was sacrificially thrown into the volcano a few years back. That was a relief!

My last day in Bali was saved for a little surfing and dinner out at one of the famous seafood warungs (a kind of casual seaside restaurant serving barbecued fish) near Jimbaran Bay. As soon as I arrived at the warung, the waiter placed a tiny flower behind my ear and marched me to a table so close to the exploding surf that I felt that it might reach up and knock me off my seat. It was the delicious grilled fish, shrimp, and other seafood items that came closer to doing that, however.

As I listened to the thundering waves and talked to a friendly Indonesian woman and her daughter by torchlight, I thought, "it just doesn't get any better than this." This was a recurrent thought of mine throughout my Bali trip. It just got better and better.



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In Touch with
Destiny

Huy Nguyen

by EDWIN CASAPAO

You've listened to the radio. You've watched movies and television. You've seen the billboards along the highways as you endure Houston traffic. Whether or not you are into pop culture, you have probably been exposed to the fruits of Huy Nguyen's labor.

Huy is an A&R (Artist & Repertoire) guy, who works with some of the biggest names in music. Previously associated with Houston-based record label and management company, Music World Entertainment, Huy's roster of achievements is quite impressive. He has provided creative and administrative direction to artists such as Destiny's Child, Beyonce, Kelly Rowland, Ray J, Michelle Williams and the legendary O'Jays. Huy recently became an independent A&R and music business consultant, re-igniting his love for the business and his passion for making records.

Now that you are an independent A&R and music business consultant, how would you describe life after Music World?

Music World prepared me well for the "real" world. It's a small company that does major record label things, allowing me to see both worlds. I now have more time to work on what's most important to me. Passion for the music is tops on my list and I'm able to focus on that first and foremost.

Latin and European artists continue to be successful in America. Do you envision Asian-American artists sharing a similar success in the near future?

I have high hopes for Asian artists in America. However, the demographics and population makeup are not set for their success in America in the immediate future. It's hard for an Asian artist to produce the numbers that an R&B or Pop artist from Europe can achieve. It won't happen immediately, but I know that it will happen during my lifetime, for sure.

Where do you see the music industry going in 2007?

I definitely envision the return of straight-up Pop music. We've seen a melting pot of genres in Pop music in which every Pop artist wanted to

get that "edge", or delve into that Urban sound. But I see them splitting into their respective genres, again. You'll have your distinct Alternative music, R&B music, and Pop music (which may have been labeled "cheesy" just a year ago) return to mainstream radio.

You've made Houston your home. Why not a music "hub" city, such as Nashville or New York?

In my last semester at Texas A&M, I was offered an internship position with Mathew Knowles at Music World, around the time that my father was very ill. I moved back to Houston to build my career and to be closer to my family. My dad fully recovered from a liver transplant, and my career has successfully developed. I will always be thankful to Mathew for the opportunities he provided me. Also, what's nice about Houston is that it is centrally located. All the music hub cities, such as New York, LA, Atlanta, Miami, and Nashville are about 3 hours away.

What is your opinion of the Houston music scene?

For years, I think there's been a misconception about the "weak" Houston music scene. Houston has proven itself to the music industry (and the world) with artists like Destiny's Child, and Hip-Hop artists Paul Wall, Mike Jones and Slim Thug, who are garnering national exposure. Texas as a whole is a great place for talent, from the Dixie Chicks to Kelly Clarkson, including a host of Indie Rock bands coming out of Austin. Ultimately, I see Houston becoming another Atlanta in just a few years.

What do you look for when seeking a new artist?

There's always the immediate image factor. But, more important are talent, vocal ability, and stage presence. Is the artist self-driven or does he or she



Photo by Debbie Porter

need a lot of direction? Does he or she write? And, how does he or she work in the studio? Ideally, I would like to work with an artist who has the whole "package". I was fortunate to work with focused artists, such as the ladies of Destiny's Child, who made my job...well, easy.

What is your professional advice for an independent artist?

If you are 100% passionate about your craft and your art, don't ever give up. Be open to any opportunity that comes your way. Every performance should be like your last, because you never know who's out there listening. Do your homework on the business and have your press kit ready. I get hundreds of pieces of mail a month. I go through them all and I respond to them all. Tip: Always put your contact information on every piece of material that you send out.

Being Vietnamese-American, how do you contribute to the Asian community?

Being so busy with Music World, I never had time to reach out to the communities that are near and dear to me. I've recently reached out to the AIDS Foundation of Houston. I plan to reach out to the Asian community

If you are 100% passionate about your craft and your art, don't ever give up.

to educate rising artists on topics such as, how they are paid, royalties and publishing, and to assist them with their creative direction. It's what comes naturally to me but, more important, it is what I enjoy the most.

Which artists do you consider "timeless"?

There are so many...I think that Carol King is an amazing songwriter, and has written songs that painted the history of our country. Vocally, I love Mariah Carey and Whitney Houston. I was just speaking of Pattie Labelle, yesterday. She's the kind of person who exudes passion from her soul. Michael Jackson has incredible talent, as well as being a great performer and songwriter.

Explain a revelation you've had and how it inspired and changed you.

I am a very spiritual person. Before every move I've ever made, I've prayed for direction and wisdom. For instance, walking away from Music World was very difficult for me, but I prayed very hard about it - everything has since fallen into place.

Do you have a burning desire to rekindle the singer/performer within?

I've had my share of performing, which was fun. However, I've never had the ultimate desire to be in the limelight. I'm passionate in being creative behind the scenes and putting together a masterpiece. In the end, I've fulfilled my passion by helping artists' dreams come true.

Where do you see yourself going in the future?

Although I know I'm proceeding in the right direction, I would love to work for Clive Davis. He is a profound, musically driven, executive who inspires me. Nonetheless, life is a continuous learning process, and whatever transpires, I'm ready for the new ride ahead.

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