

FASHION LIFESTYLE ART ENTERTAINMENT

yellow™

NOVEMBER 2006

FREE

Willy Wang
Draws a Crowd

Kim Son
Grows With Us

Lost is Found:
Cambodia

Dressing Up
for Jason Wu

Gold Angelica gown - Jayson Brunson
Bracelet - Subversive Jewelry

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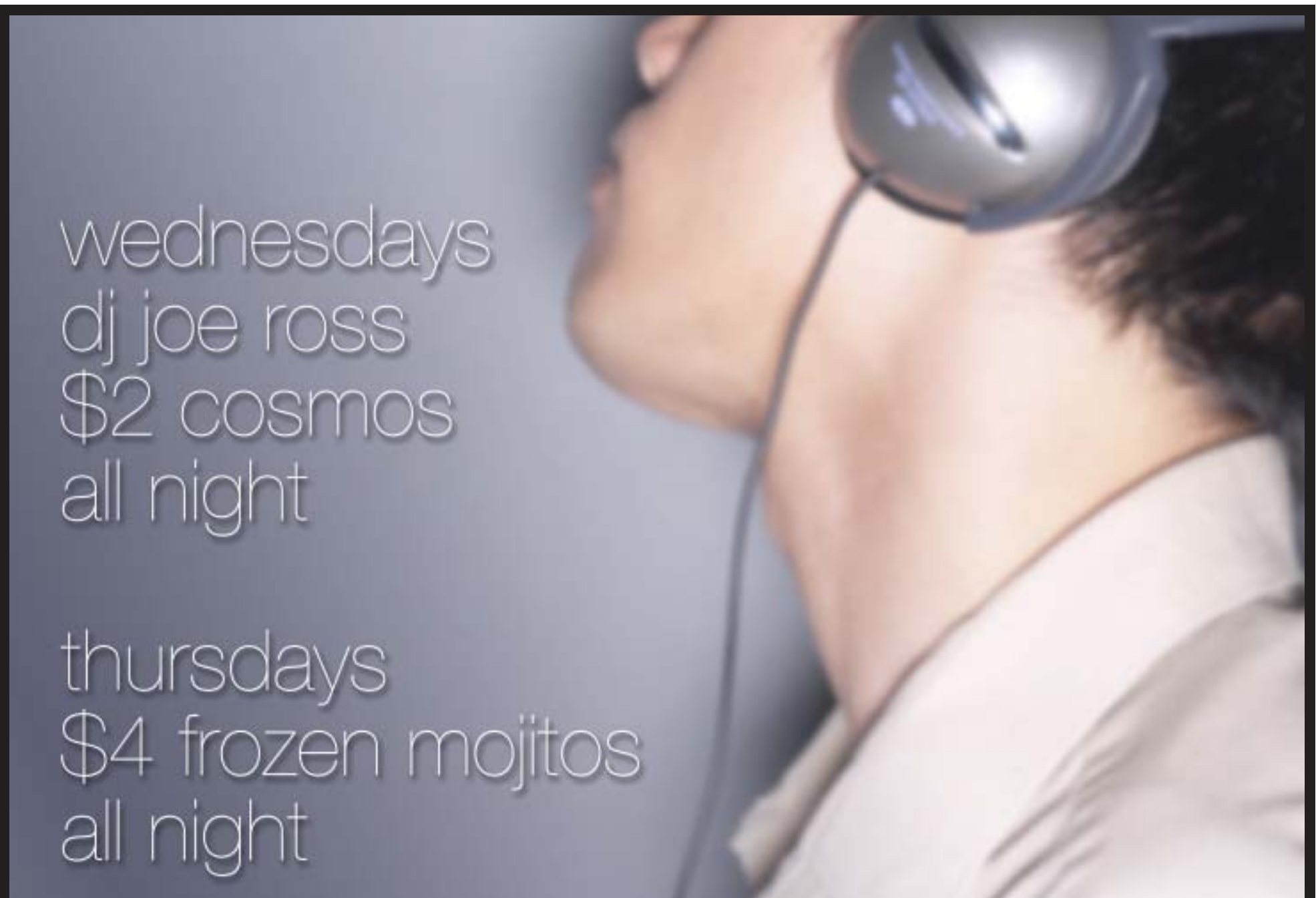
Photographer : Jhane Hoang Stylist : Marc Sifuentes Hair & Makeup : Nany Art Director : John Paul Tran Model : Eileen Feighny@Next NY



As you peruse the pages of this month's issue of *Yellow Magazine*, it will become evident that there are many events that are highlighted with pages of photos. In the publication industry, the photographic documentation of these events is commonly referred to as "picture pics". Aside from the obvious aspect that looking at these pictures can be entertaining for many readers who see if they can spot people they recognize, the primary purpose of the photographs is to highlight the people, agencies and events that benefit the community as a whole.

During the holiday season, such events occur with increasing frequency. Consequently, we are compelled and honored to share the photographs that chronicle these occasions with our readers. It is our hope and aspiration that the positive energy that underlies much of this activity will inspire you during this season of giving, sharing and celebrating.

Viet Hoang
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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 October 2006 Issue Release Party

Held at Peel Gallery

The Yellow Magazine October Release Party was held at Peel Gallery, Anya Tish Gallery and Barbara Davis Gallery. We would like to thank Café Tin Tin for their delicious food, Zipang for the Sparkling Sake which was a big hit, Han Vodka and Bud Light.



Summer Valente, Vy le



Daniel Hok, Rochelle Abante, Tuyen Hoang Phi Nguyen



Kevin Yu, Johnny Tran



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The Defining Essence
of Artistry

Willy (Wei Li) Wang

by HENRI MERCERON



Willy Wang came to Houston in 1983, where admiration of his work has won him numerous commissions throughout the city. These include “Jesus Healing”, a bronze sculpture prominently situated in the lobby of Methodist Hospital; four bas relief panels featuring former President George H.W. Bush who joined Willy and others at the unveiling of Bush’s monument located in downtown’s Sesquicentennial Park; and the towering bronze sculpture of George R. Brown in front of Houston’s convention center.

Wei Li (Willy) Wang embodies all the characteristics that one would expect of a great artist. He speaks in a soft voice with words that are almost poetic about the works of Michelangelo, Leonardo and Raphael. As a young boy, while other children played their carefree games, young Willy looked at books containing pictures of the works of those artists and his imagination was stirred by their genius. When he had the opportunity as an adult to view the actual sculptures where they are permanently displayed, his eyes could not hold back the tears of joy that overwhelmed him. Willy knows the power of art. I know the genius of Willy. And it is this that I wish to share with you.

It was a drawing of a pair of very pretty girls wearing feathers that fluttered from their hats that caused Willy’s parents to first become aware of their son’s artistic talent. He was five years old.

His father was an engineer who oversaw the expansion of railroads and paved roads throughout the isolated regions of China. His mother, educated in Chinese literature, had the formidable task of creating a stable home life for her family as they traveled from one area to the next. However, it was these relocations that exposed Willy to some of the most powerful influences that would come to bare upon him as an artist – exposure to distinctive cultures and ethnicities of the people who populated the far reaches of China and, in turn, populated his mind with a wealth of imagery from which he would gather inspiration.

The Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing was established in 1950 and has since been a dominant force in higher art education in China. When Willy graduated high school, he competed with hundreds of prospective students vying for a place in the incoming class. There were five fields of study offered, including canvas painting, Chinese painting, block print, art

history and sculpture. Sculpture had only seven spots to fill in 1957. Willy filled one of them.

For the next five years, he was immersed in art. He was trained in the Western tradition in anatomy, structure, proportion and perspective, as his professors were themselves trained in France. While students were encouraged to remain on campus, Willy’s fascination for cinema and stage performances could best be enjoyed if he lived at home. His teacher’s observation that “Dancing is very close to sculpture,” only reinforced Willy’s strong connection with the performing arts, which he gained as a child reading about Chinese and American actors and films. (His home is filled with photographs of him and the many Hollywood actors and actresses he has met at the Oscars and other events.)

When I first met Willy in his Houston residence, I was immediately immersed in a multi-media gallery of artistic portraiture. Terra cotta, wood, marble, bronze sculptures; abstract (or “modernistic” as Willy prefers), realistic, smooth texture, etched texture, black and white and color, and black and white on color (paper) drawings and paintings and movie posters. The range of creative energy was wide.

The dominant sense that I could not keep from expressing aloud was that Willy had captured the essence of the people he sculpted, sketched or painted. He was delighted with my observation and declared, “You

get it!” Whereas, I felt honored, I think just about anyone who observes his work would “get it”. It is quite remarkable in that you can look in the eyes of all the portraits and feel their presence. You feel as though you know them.

This concept of “essence” is central to the power of Willy’s portraits. An interesting perspective on his uncanny ability to infuse his portraits with essence is to look at his book of celebrity caricatures. The only way you will not recognize a caricature is if you are unfamiliar with what the underlying celebrity looks like. At the most basic level, a caricature requires that the artist capture the essence of the person. Willy develops his caricatures by drawing the person’s essential features and then he subtracts more and more lines that are “nonessential”. Ultimately, what remains is an easily identifiable celebrity represented by only a few very essential ink lines.

Willy continues to travel throughout the world. He is always learning and taking mental notes that he stores in the database of his mind. “All sculpture is 3D but not all 3D is sculpture.” “In sculpture, form is important but content is more important.” Willy has a very clear understanding of what he considers to be a sculpture and what he does not. He tried to explain it to me but, this time, I don’t think I “got it.” I have the sense that those sculptures he liked were sculptures and those that he did not were... well, something else. But hey, it is almost like appreciating a good wine, I suppose. You may not know that it has “fingers” and that the tannins work well with wild game and that the bouquet has “hints” of lotus blossoms. What you *do* know is that it is fabulous. In a similar fashion, while I may not be able to grasp Willy’s definition of what constitutes a sculpture, I *do* know that his sculptures portray the human condition with such clarity and dimension that you will never view sculpture in the same way again.

His sculptures portray the human condition with such clarity and dimension that you will never view sculpture in the same way again.

As a final note, Willy started teaching sculpture at the Art League of Houston in 1992. He noticed that many of his students did not have a sound foundation in drawing and that that was hampering their development as sculptors. In response, he volunteered to teach Saturday drawing classes to any student who was interested. It is a class that has continued for fourteen years and has grown in size to 120 students ranging in age from 25 to 92. Many of the original classmates remain and a sense of family has engendered. Aside from participating in Willy’s Workshop, they engage in social events and travel to other countries once a year where they explore indigenous art treasures and cultures. A spouse of one of Willy’s students was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Shortly before he succumbed, he asked Willy to please continue his workshop so that his wife would always have a place to go, a place where she could continue to flourish and enjoy life with her extended family. It would appear that the gift that Willy so generously shares with the world, capturing the essence of its diverse people, mirrors that which is found in his heart. In essence, it is his essence that emanates from deep within all his creations. It is the essence of love. His love of people. His love for humanity.



Lily Chen Foster
oil on canvas
Private Collection



Left: *Jesus-The Great Physician*, bronze and granite, Methodist Hospital, Houston, Texas
Center: *Spring in Pamirs*, marble, National Art Museum of China, Beijing
Right: *Tibetan Series #1*, conte, Private Collection

A limited edition book of Willy Wang’s art is available for sale.
Visit his website at willywang.com

AABA Gala

Held at the Intercontinental Hotel

Asian American Bar Association (AABA) Gala was held at the Intercontinental Hotel. This year, Gordon Quan was the recipient of the AABA Impact Award.



Karen and Robert Kwok, Gordon Quan, Elsie Huang



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William and Mandy Kao



Andrea Tran, Emily Kuo



Judy Liu, Claire Kugler



Benjamin Bai, Tiffany Kwon, Victor Tong, Jonathan Fong



Hubert Vo, Hoang Quan Vu



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Bringing Dressy Back

Jason Wu by LEO SIPRAS

Jason Wu may not yet be a household name, but this talented designer of doll and women's clothing is changing all that. Born in Taiwan, this 23-year-old wunderkind has captured the attention of major fashion magazines, and his dresses have graced the backs of high profile celebrities. His reverence for the master couturiers of the past has helped establish his signature feminine and polished dresses as the ones that women seek with anticipation. His talent has thrust him into an ever-widening spotlight as his business continues to thrive.

Were you always interested in fashion?

Yes, fashion has always been my passion; I can't imagine myself doing anything else.

How did you get your start?

I had somewhat of an unconventional start, actually. I was designing these high-end couture dolls for years before I started my clothing line last year. Having the previous business experience really gave me the knowledge that I needed to go into fashion.

What do your family and friends think of your success? Have they always been supportive of your career choices?

I have the most amazing friends, a lot of whom I've known from school. I really credit my friends for being there for me when things got difficult. In fact, all of my employees now were my friends to start with; it's like a family-run studio here. My family has also been incredibly supportive the entire way.

Not only are you a talented fashion designer, you're an accomplished doll designer as well. Which gives you more joy?

I really love doing both. I think ideas definitely bounce off of both jobs and it's all very inspiring.

Your Fall 2006 collection marked your runway debut at New York Fashion Week. What was the experience of staging a fashion show like?

It was surreal. It is amazing how much we learned as a company through doing that show, sort of like a "crash course" in the fashion business. I am definitely very proud of the end results.

As a young designer, is it difficult to attract top editors, stylists, and models to attend your shows?

Yes, it is. Fashion is known for being notoriously difficult to break into, so being young certainly makes it all the more challenging. I've been very lucky to receive an amazing amount of support from the industry, though.

Do you ever read reviews of your collections?

I do. I don't just want to hear the good stuff. At the end of the day, I want to learn from every collection and grow from them, so it is important for me to read what the critics have to say.



What are you inspired by when you design a collection? Is it a particular woman, a mood, or a story? What were your inspirations for your Spring 2007 collection?

I am a huge vintage movie buff. My Spring 2007 collection was inspired by Elizabeth Taylor, whom I consider to be one of the greatest style icons of our time. I mixed her classic style with architectural influences to make clothes that have that timeless quality, but very much for the modern day women.

There are so many young talented designers generating press right now. How do you differentiate yourself from your peers?

My clothes are made to last, in more ways than one. I am not interested in designing what is trendy right now. When my customer buys one of my garments, she knows that she is making a long-term investment.

You attended Parsons School of Design and interned at Narciso Rodriguez. What are some lessons you learned while working with such an influential designer?

I learned a lot from the actual working experience at Narciso Rodriguez. It was really important for me to get that insight into the fashion world before starting my own line, because you really come to appreciate just how much work goes into putting a collection together.

Who are some designers you admire and who influences you?

I am influenced by Charles James and Christian Dior because they made such amazing, feminine clothes. The construction and work that went into their garments were mind-boggling.

Can you describe to us the Jason Wu aesthetic?

It is all about making sexy, feminine clothes while maintaining style and good taste. I want to bring dressing up back into fashion.

Red carpet dressing is so crucial right now to a young designer trying to increase visibility. How did you get to dress Eva Longoria for the Emmys?

Eva's stylist, Robert Verdi, made the connection. He had dressed her in something of mine for Marcia Cross's wedding earlier this year. She liked the idea of wearing a new designer, so she asked me to design her Emmy dress. I actually made two dresses for her out of the initial three that I sketched out, and she picked the one she wanted to wear. Everything was surprisingly smooth!

Is there a certain celebrity you would love to dress?

I would love to dress Scarlett Johansson and Kate Blanchett.

What does the future hold for Jason Wu?

A lot! Right now I am focusing on building a strong foundation to make sure that the Jason Wu brand is here to stay.

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Gloves - Carolina Amato
Earrings - Siman Tu



Olive satin dress - Chanpaul
Shoes - Moschino
Tights - Wolford
Necklace - Subversive Jewelry

fashion drama

Photographer : Jhane Hoang Stylist : Marc Sifuentes Hair & Makeup : Nany Art Director : John Paul Tran Model : Eileen Feighny@Next NY

Green satin pleated dress - Jason Wu
Shoes - Marc Jacobs



Cream silk dress with brown lace peek - Jason Wu
Necklace - Siman Tu



Ice blue silk twill dress - Jason Wu
Gloves - La Crasia



Grey silk gown and pleated bolero - Gustavo Cadile
Earrings - Siman Tu

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Satisfying a
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Kim Son by HENRI MERCERON



The Kim Son dynasty represents a success story that epitomizes “The American Dream” in the classical sense. Kim Su Tran La (aka Mama La) and her husband, Son, operated the first Kim Son restaurant in Vinh Long, Vietnam. When the communists gained control of the country, Kim and Son uprooted their family by way of Malaysia and united with other family members in Houston. In 1982, two years following their arrival in Houston, they opened the first Kim Son in the old Chinatown.

When I started working in downtown Houston in 1984, my co-workers introduced me to Kim Son, which they frequented for its “awesome” buffet. The first thing I remembered is that the lunchtime clientele was predominantly non-Asian. Growing up in New York City, whenever my parents and I went to a new Chinese restaurant (there weren’t any Vietnamese restaurants, as far as I knew), my father would say, “It must be a good Chinese restaurant. Look at all the Chinese people eating here.” So, before I sat down to eat at Kim Son for the very first time, not seeing many Asian patrons, my expectations were not high. Afterwards, I was relieved that my father’s observations were not infallible. I became a regular customer, thereafter. Actually, to this day, I still crave the baked chicken, sometimes at the most inopportune time, such as midnight. Thank you, Mama La!

I do not recall how big the original Kim Son restaurant was, but it was always packed, the food was always consistently good, and the buffet was always value priced. So successful was that formula that eleven years later, the old restaurant was replaced by a nearby 22,000 square foot (now, that is big... *very big*) \$2 million building that incorporated a sizeable banquet facility.

Today, there are several Kim Son restaurants around Houston. Notwithstanding the success of the downtown location, the company appears to have followed a strategy that, in part, links its continued growth with the growth and influence of the Asian community. The Stafford restaurant serves the Sugarland area, while the newest location in the new Chinatown (Bellaire at Wilcrest) is a spectacle to behold. In keeping with the statement, “Everything is bigger in Texas”, this restaurant and banquet facility occupies 35,000 square feet and is opulently appointed with decorative wrought iron stair banisters and gleaming marble floors. It is very light, bright, clean and organized.

The Bellaire facility offers an extensive buffet that includes an enormous variety of authentic Vietnamese selections, amongst others. If you want a selection of cold meats that includes duck, chicken, beef, octopus, or jellyfish, you can have it. If you want

a selection of cooked meats and seafood, you can have that, too. You can have a variety of noodle soups including dumpling, beef noodle, and clear noodle with chicken. But, if you prefer, the old standbys – egg drop and hot and sour soup – are also available.

And there is more. You can have Lau (soup) in the traditional manner. Basically, a table cooker is placed in the center of the table with a split pot of near-boiling soup broth. On one side is a mild broth and on the other, a spicier one. To either (or both sides, if you choose) you add the raw ingredients from a separate buffet station. It includes such items as thinly sliced beef, squid, liver, tofu (dry and regular), mussels, crab, shrimp, mushroom, fish balls, meatballs and white fungus. A few minutes later, simply use the ladle provided to serve your soup.

And there is still more. Perhaps you have a taste for one of the eight selections of sushi rolls. And let us not forget about dessert! I especially like the sticky rice paste balls with lotus seed paste inside. One is fried with sesame seeds sprinkled on the outside and the other is not fried and smothered in light sweet ginger sauce. I also like the Banh Da Lon, which has the appearance of a rectangle with layers of yellow and green; the yellow consists of mung bean and the green is gelatin. Cover this with coconut milk. Delicious!

Again, for the less adventuresome, flan, cookies, cake and ice cream is also available.

As a final note, if you happen to read commentaries about Kim Son, you will note recurrent references to the exhaustive menu. The number of selections is truly mind boggling. Similarly, when you pay your \$14.95 entry fee to enjoy Kim Son’s buffet wonderland, be prepared for culinary overload. I have not, nor do I represent that I have, listed everything that the buffet offers. You really need to get there in person and navigate the numerous stations yourself to appreciate the sheer number of choices that await you. Soon, the restaurant will offer roasted pig and barbecue pork that will hang from hooks in the dumpling station. My favorite! Can’t wait!



Co-owner Tony La

When you pay your \$14.95 entry fee to enjoy Kim Son’s buffet wonderland, be prepared for culinary overload.



Dry Roses with
Fruity Noses

That Special Meal

by PHILIP CUSIMANO

Thanksgiving Day dinner officially kicks off the holiday party season. It is the traditional centerpiece of activity where we pause to reflect with family and friends and to give thanks for all that is good in our lives.

Of course, whenever good and like-minded people come together to dine, there is a call for that most social of all beverages, wine. Careful consideration is required to find the right wine to accompany a Thanksgiving menu and, with that in mind, we offer some suggestions.

Sparkling wine is always appropriate for special occasions and goes well with traditional Thanksgiving fare. There are a variety of good options from which to select, including Champagne, California sparkling, Italian Spumante, and Spanish Cava. These offer a variety of prices to match any budget. Sparkling wine may be served during the entire meal or just used as an aperitif. In either case, for Thanksgiving dinner, remember to keep it very dry.

My favorite Thanksgiving wine is a dry rose. Dry roses, like sparkling wines, go with almost everything. Good roses offer a medium body with soft fruit tones buttressed with a crisp dryness that matches well with the signature

flavor profiles found in Thanksgiving feasts. As with sparkling wines, you can find a good selection of dry rose wines offering price ranges that will not bankrupt the coffers.

In general, look for wines that are light to medium bodied with the delicate balance of dryness and fruit flavors. Red wines that may work include Syrah, Pinot Noir (especially from Oregon), Dolcetto and Beaujolais. For white wine, try Riesling and Gewürztraminer (a good selection of these wines can be found from the Alsace region of France).

Avoid wines that are buttery and creamy, that have harsh tannins, are too dry or too sweet or that are over oaked. The important thing is to find a decent bottle that does not clash with the traditional fare of this holiday meal.

I recommend that you plan on pouring no more than four glasses of wine per 750ml. bottle. This is a generous pour but the meal itself is not tightfisted. You can conservatively estimate that each guest will consume two glasses of wine. If you do the math, a party of four will need eight glasses of wine, so you will need two bottles.

Of course, whenever good and like-minded people come together to dine, there is a call for that most social of all beverages, wine.



Here are some wines for this special meal:

Rosa del Golfo Rose 2003

This dry rose can be found on my Thanksgiving Day table. It is a Salento Rosato from the Puglia region of Italy (heel of the boot) and is a blend of Negroamaro and Malvasia. This label is so internationally renowned that the entire winery was named in its honor. For more than a hundred years, the Calo family has been making some of the best wines in all of Puglia under the label Rosa del Golfo (Rose of the Gulf). The wine offers an intense perfumed nose of flowers and red berries with slight hints of spice under elegant fruit flavors in a dry and crisp body. Can anyone say "pass the duck"? \$16.75

Pierre Sparr Gewürztraminer Alsace 2004

From Alsace in France comes this lovely entry that should placate all guests seated at the table. The white wine is crisp and dry showing ripe tropical fruits with a hint of grapefruit and pear. It has great balance with the right amount of acid, sweetness and smoke. Pierre Sparr is a trusted name in Alsatian wine and this selection is a good value. As the old folk used to say, "gewurzt until you hurtz". \$13.00

Lockwood Vineyard Pinot Noir Block # 7 2004

Located in southern Monterey County, California comes this venerable red varietal from Lockwood Vineyards that has built its reputation on estate grown grapes. This Pinot Noir is a single vineyard rendition that is medium to full-bodied offering a violet nose leading to juicy fruit tones of ripe plums and black berries. There is enough acidity and variety of flavors within a fine balance to recommend that this Monterey California red make your short list. \$24.00

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University of Houston Asian American Studies Celebration

Held at the Conrad H. Hilton Hotel

University of Houston Asian American Studies Center celebrated a decade of accomplishments with a 10th Anniversary Gala held at the Conrad H. Hilton Hotel honoring State Representative Martha Wong and Attorney Harry Gee.



Ann Cheng, Lily Foster, Yuki Rogers



Paul Chu, Elsie Huang



Martha Wong



Yao Ming, Jay Gogue



Shawn Guo, Miya Shay, Tom Griffin



Wei-Kan Chu, Agnes Chu, Loren Shen



Sabrina Nguyen, Patrick Cheung



Winnie Chong, Arlene Machetta, Christina Lee



Charles and Lily Foster



Diane Yoo, Christine Lee



Monit and Patrick Cheung



Peggy Luo, Mary Fu



Yali Zou



Linda Liu, Kevin Lee



Gigi Lee

OCA of Greater Houston 7th Annual Gala

Held at the Westin Oaks Hotel

OCA of Greater Houston held their 7th Annual Gala, "They Serve with Honor", at the Westin Oaks Hotel honoring the contributions of Katrina victims. The honorees included The Small and Independent Motel Owners Association, The Tawainese Innkeeper's Association, Mrs. Leeshan Birney, and the Duong Family. OCA also honored the outstanding Asian Pacific Americans in the work place who "Serve with Honor."



Linda Toyota, Jenny Ko Calaway



Ceyan, Mayling, Leeshan and James Birney



Kevin O'Leary, Glen Gondo, David Villarrubia



Frank, Sophia, and James Yu



Mini Timmaraju, MJ Khan, Grace Rodriguez, Hubert Vo



Yani and Saoroth Keo



Kristi Thibault, Mandy Kao



Honorees



Andrew Gee, Janella Gee, Thanh Luu, Dan Le



Ming Lo, Ming Burdett, Jane Chong, Bill Kwan, Mai Huynh, Stephanie Chi



Henry Li

Commendation Award

Held at the home of Yoshihiko Kamo

Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation Award Recipient hosted by Consul General of Japan Yoshihiko Kamo. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan awarded Ms. Sandra Tanamachi for her outstanding contributions to the enhancement of the relationship between Japan and the United States for her successful campaign over the past 12 years in ridding the state of Texas of the name of "Jap" road.



Kikuko Tanamachi, Sandra Tanamachi, Consul General Kamo



Gina and Eric Lindsay



Daniel Watanabe, Aiko Watanabe, Kunio Nakamura



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On the Trail
of Indiana Jones

A Wealth of Ruins

by MATT SIMS



As I lowered my head to pass beneath yet another intricately carved stone doorway, I couldn't help but feel like Indiana Jones on some mystical adventure. After all, it is not everyday you find yourself exploring the ruins of long abandoned, ancient stone temples shrouded in mist. However, if you are visiting Cambodia, this is probably how you will spend most of your time.

I was just outside the small city of Siem Reap, which is famous for the unbelievably large Angkor Wat temple complex. I had seen photographs of these magnificent buildings in books, but no picture did justice to what I was seeing now. An inner temple was surrounded by enormous crumbling stone walls adorned by beautiful sculptures. Giant strangler fig trees wrapped their limbs around and through the buildings, both embracing and destroying what the Khmer people of Cambodia had built long ago. It was no wonder that the directors of *Tomb Raider*, *Mortal Kombat*, and several other films had chosen this exotic location in South East Asia to shoot their movies. Angkor Wat consists of a number of temples built from the 9th to the 15th century, and is spread over several miles of jungle. Each temple is dramatically different from the others, characterized by grand gates, moats, tall ramparts, or large sculptures of kings and deities.

Surprisingly, getting to this unusual destination is not difficult. I flew into Siem Reap from Bangkok, Thailand, on a short, 45-minute flight which operates several times daily. You may also fly in from Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Hanoi, Hong Kong, Singapore, or Kuala Lumpur, although daily flights are not offered by all these cities. Other cities offer connecting flights through the capital, Phnom Penh, which has become a popular tourist destination because of its interesting museums and markets. Many people include a visit to the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum or the actual Killing Fields outside of Phnom Penh, as it is an emotionally stirring and worthwhile experience.

In Siem Reap, accommodations range from 5-star luxury hotels like the Amansara, the King's former guest villa costing up to \$1,000 per night, to more modest guest houses like the Dead Fish Guesthouse, which charges \$15 for a night's stay. I had made arrangements to stay at a charming guesthouse called Nida Villa, conveniently located off the main road between the busy downtown area and the entrance to Angkor Wat. I was amazed that for a modest \$25 per night I could get such a nice room including breakfast, while avoiding the loud tour groups frequenting the larger western style hotels. Upon request, they prepared a traditional multi-course dinner of delicious Cambodian specialties, a treat that shouldn't be missed.

Throughout my stay, I was delighted and surprised by the quality and variety of the food. Even the inexpensive food stalls and tin shed restaurants built near the temples for the tourists serve wonderful curries, noodles, and fried rice dishes as good as any upscale restaurant. I was expecting the quality of most food found near typical tourist sights, but these dishes were prepared with fresh ingredients and potent spices, and cost almost nothing.

As the heat of the afternoon wore on, it was an excellent time to take a short drive into town and do some shopping at the Psar Chaa Old Market near the center of town. You'll pass several large souvenir stores on the way, but it is in the old French Quarter among the colonial style buildings where the shopping is best. Most of the market is covered, so you will stay cool. As you pass through the narrow alleys surrounded on both sides by antiques, statues, carvings, jewelry, and clothing sellers, you may find it difficult to resist the polite invitations to look closer or

to strike a bargain. The vendors are anxious to make a deal, but the loud, aggressive selling tactics that you see in some markets in other parts of the world are not used here. T-shirts can be had for as little as \$2.00, and jewelry is also a real bargain.

One section of the market is where the locals shop for vegetables, spices, fish, meat, and other household necessities. I found this area most interesting, as I wandered up and down the aisles looking at many strange unknown ingredients for a long time.

I recommend driving outside of the immediate area to see one of the more distant temples, such as Bantrey Srey. These temples cannot compare to the larger structures near Siem Reap, but the drive exposes you to how most of the people live. As we drove past the green fields, small children waved from the roadside as their mothers bent over open fires preparing palm sugar candy. I asked my driver to stop in front of one of the thatched huts raised on stilts where friendly ladies were cooking palm sugar in large woks before carefully pouring the mixture into sliced bamboo stalks where it cools into a round sugar candy. They seemed surprised that I was interested in their work, and were happy to pose for photographs. Nearby, crowds of children gathered to gawk while their dogs growled at me.

Even the inexpensive food stalls and tin shed restaurants built near the temples for the tourists serve wonderful curries, noodles, and fried rice dishes as good as any upscale restaurant.

The ladies proudly showed me the stuffed scarecrows dressed in men's clothing placed near the entrance to their homes. They are called "guardians" who keep away evil spirits. I guess I must be all right since I got past it.

While the friendliness of the people made it hard for me to leave Cambodia, I could never get enough of the temples themselves. I returned again and again to gaze upon the enigmatic stone faces on the massive gates of Bayon temple that stared down at me from the height of a seven story building; Angkor Wat's courtyards within courtyards within yet more courtyards, built up like a mountain fortress only accessible via impossibly steep stone staircases; and the seductive, half-nude exotic Apsara dancers carved on the walls of practically every temple.

I imagine how grand they must have been at their peak in 1200 AD, how they must have looked when French missionaries uncovered them in the 1860's, and how deserted they were when the Khmer Rouge took over in the 1970's. Somehow, in spite of its troubled past, Cambodia has maintained a gentle and a peaceful resiliency that, like these incredible buildings, defies reason.

I purposefully avoided the glances of other tourists wandering the ruins, fearing that contact with them would somehow break the spell that this place has put on me, reminding me that I would soon have to leave. I am certainly no Indiana Jones. I didn't own a bullwhip and I wasn't chasing rare artifacts or running from angry natives. Nonetheless, I did feel as if I had an adventure. And, I am ready for the sequel.



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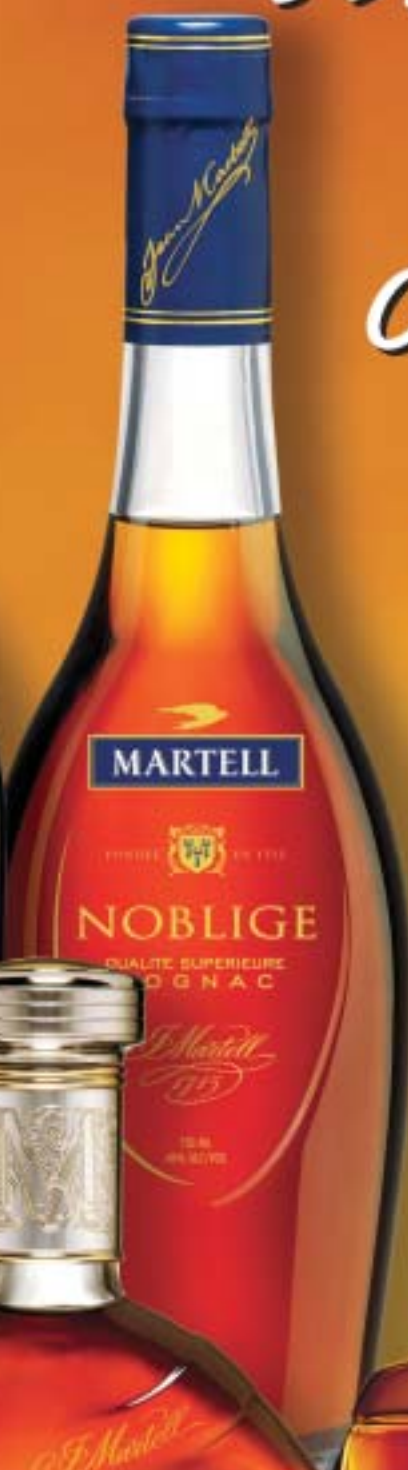




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