

THE FOOD JOURNAL

Dedicated to pursuing food history and supporting culinary collections at the Los Angeles Public Library

What's Spanish about Espagnole?



Charles Perry
CHSC President

If you look into any 20th-century source about French food, from *Larousse Gastronomique* to Julia Child, you will find that *sauce espagnole* – one of the famous four “mother sauces” – is beef stock thickened with a dark roux and simmered for hours with onions, celery and carrots, plus a helping of tomato paste to give it heft.

The Internet, as usual, is rife with confident half-baked ideas about this. One site says it was invented by August Escoffier (1846-1935) in the 1870s. Well, in a sense that's true, but was it a total invention? And most of all, why would he call it Spanish?

It was because he was simplifying an earlier sauce of the same name. Escoffier's job was to adapt the dishes of aristocrats' kitchens for restaurant use, and traditional *espagnole* recipes were like the one given by his illustrious predecessor Antonin Carême: simmer two big pieces of ham, a leg of veal and a partridge or two pheasants, maybe a couple of saddles of hare, down to a glaze, then throw out the meats and thin the meat essence with *sauce velouté* (chicken gravy). Tasty, but not very restaurant-friendly.

Some Internetters have noticed that this use of multiple meats recalls the Spanish dish *olla podrida*. When that dish (spelled “olio”) became fashionable in England during the 17th century, it continued the tradition -- the editor of Robert May's *The Accomplish't Cook* (1660) describes one of his olio recipes as a veritable Noah's ark of animal protein.

Continued on page 6

Program Notes



Nancy Zaslavsky
CHSC Vice President,
Programs

Huge smiles and bigger hugs were everywhere Saturday, January 14th at Charles Perry's talk, “Eat Like an Egyptian Pharaoh.” It had been almost three years since our group met in person at the Central Library's Taper Auditorium and familiar faces of long-time friends were more welcome than we ever thought possible. Zooming kept us alive during the worst of Covid when we trapped homebodies welcomed CHSC's rays of sunshine through the Darth. Okay, a bit dramatic but you get what I mean. It's great to be back!

If you missed virtual programs during last season here's a rundown. Catch up on the CHSC website and please check out its new changes

at chsocial.org Programs continued through July and August, our usual summer hiatus, to keep up the momentum of flowing good vibes. Richard Foss spoke July 2022 on “Dickens' Diet, in Books and in Life” with vivid examples of what British dishes were like when Dickens was young and how they changed as he aged. Charles Perry treated us with a second lecture in August with “Antonin Carême: Mr. Nouvelle Cuisine of 1820” the creative superstar chef to Napoleon and Czar Alexander I of Russia. Leslie Goddard presented a totally different outlook on culinary history in September with a timely talk about epidemics with “Who Was Typhoid Mary?” Constance L. Kirker and Mary Newman gave a lively talk in October on “Cuckoo for Coconuts” about the global history of coconut from ancient history to its recent super-food status. November brought Nancy Harmon Jenkins, through her virtual presentation “Martha Ballard's Diaries: A Kitchen and a Garden on the Maine Frontier” where she shared, through Martha's writings, how Mainers ate, what they grew, and how they cooked and celebrated in the late 18th and early

Continued on page 6



Upcoming Programs at the Central Library's Mark Taper Auditorium (unless otherwise specified)

January 14, 2023
Charles Perry
"Eat Like an Egyptian Pharaoh"

February 11, 2023
Valerie Campbell
"A Brief History of Ice Cream: Ice Cream and Frozen Desserts from the Roman Empire to the Present Day"

March 11, 2023
Sarah Lohman
"Endangered Eating: America's Vanishing Food"

April 8, 2023
Suzanne Joskow
"L.A.'s Community Cookbooks: Overview & CHSC Project"

May 13, 2023
Liz Pollock
"Plug It In, Turn It On: 75 Years of Appliance Manuals"

June 10
Bonnie Benwick
"Food Writing, Unfolded" (program via Zoom)

There has never been a better time to join or re-join the Culinary Historians of Southern California. It checks all the boxes:

- ✓ Network with food historians, authors, cooks, journalists, and just plain food lovers
- ✓ Attend special members-only events (book club, international dinners at private homes)
- ✓ Support LAPL's culinary collection of books, magazines, and digital resources
- ✓ Inclusion in the CHSC's annual Member Directory

All this for as little as \$30 a year! Scan the QR Code to learn more.



Found in the Stacks: Victory Vittles (1941-1945)

Do you enjoy perusing cookbooks for new-to-you tasty recipes? I often get lost in the aisles for quite a long time browsing the culinary collection at the Central Library. With food prices on the rise I thought back to stories my grandmother would tell of ration books, shortages of sugar and meat, and her dislike of butter substitutes. Butter substitutes aside, maybe World War II era cookbooks could offer up some tips for stretching a food budget.

The library has a large selection of cookbooks from 1941-1945 to choose from. Some are only available for use at the library but it was very easy to ask at the Science and Technology reference desk on Lower Level 2/LL2 for them to be pulled. [And don't forget, the cookbooks you see on the shelves are just a fraction of the cookbooks available, there are even more in the library's closed stacks that can be pulled upon request.] Many of the cookbooks I looked at gave recipes featuring foodstuffs unaffected by rationing, substitutes for sugar, tips on what to pack in a factory worker's lunch, and information on growing your own food in a victory garden. Reading the recipes was fascinating, especially the



Lunch for the factory worker from *Wartime Canning and Cooking Book* by Josephine Gibson

ingredient pairings and recipe formats. Although some dishes such as Peanut Butter Loaf, which included lima beans and cooked carrots mixed with breadcrumbs, were best left as reference only. And yes—whether you call it dried beef, chipped beef, or frizzled beef—many of the cookbooks include variations on the popular SOS dish.

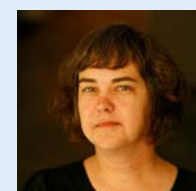
There are also numerous World War II era cookbooks available to check out. I was pleasantly surprised by one particular book published in Hollywood in 1943 titled *Coupon Cookery, A Guide to Good Meals Under Wartime Conditions of Rationing and Food Shortages* by Prudence

Penny. In addition to food substitution information, there were several pages of money-saving tips (e.g. how to jazz up leftovers, root-to-stem cooking), fun illustrations, and regionally-named recipes such as Los Angeles Pot Pie and Balboa Summer Salad. Prudence Penny, the pseudonym used by food column/home economics writers in Hearst newspapers nationwide, was in this case (according to local newspaper accounts) Lucile Martens who wrote for the *Los Angeles Examiner* from 1941-1944. Another former Examiner Prudence Penny, Pauline Saylor Patterson (aka Polly Patterson), had a radio show on KFAC. In 1942 she put the call out to her listeners to share their own recipes of “foods for defense.” The recipes were gathered and published as *Victory Vittles*. Visit the library to learn more about those vittles.



Illustration from *Coupon Cookery* (1943)

The library offers books that explain the hows and whys and ins and outs of rationing. *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* by Harvey Levenstein offers a great overview on the food shortages, nutritional values, and government agencies that affected cookery during World War II. But whatever you do, don't miss M.F.K. Fisher's *How to Cook a Wolf* (1942). Ms. Fisher described what it was like to set food on the table during World War II, and in a revised edition in the 1950s, reflected on her original book in retrospect. There was something to take away from each of the books I looked through, and more than one something to leave right where it was....



Tiffney Sanford joined the Culinary Historians in 2007 and enjoys browsing the large culinary collection at Central Library. She maintains (to varying degrees of regularity) the blogs *Hollywood Gastronomical Haunts* and *Los Angeles Library Tour*, and contributes to the *Los Angeles Public Library blog*.

The California Bear-Chef first appeared in the *Pan-Pacific Cook Book*, 1915.



630 West Fifth Street
Los Angeles, CA 90071-2002
Address Correction Requested

at the
LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY
The Culinary Historians of Southern California

THANK YOU for being a member of CHSC!

A fascinating news tidbit passed along by CHSC member Eric Boardman: Clues at ancient lake site in Israel reveal earliest known cooked meal that featured a 6.5-ft.-long fish occurring 780,000 years ago: <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/14/world/earliest-evidence-of-cooking-with-fire-scn/index.html>

I'll Have Mine Rare, Books That Is

By Ellen Sandler

The Main Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library has an extensive Culinary Collection and a beautiful Rare Books Reading Room. Book Group member and librarian (Science and Technology Department) Stella Mittelbach, thought that was a perfect combination and arranged for the CHSC Book Group to meet there and view an exhibit curated especially for us by Ani Boyadjian, Principal Librarian, Research and Special Collections.



Ani had selected and displayed an array of antique books for us to look at. Highlights included: a personal recipe collection, dated 1762, of several hundred pages, every recipe gracefully hand written in sepia ink (We noticed that the recipe for cheesecake had a side notation saying "not very good." No doubt, an 18th Century Yelp rating.); *Mushrooms, Edible and Poisonous*, a beautifully illustrated guide from the 1930s; and the quaintly out of date *How to Keep a Husband or Culinary Tactics* from 1872.

Getting a Look at the 18th Century Manuscript

In addition to rare books, the library has more than 17,000 menus in its culinary archives and we got to see vintage ones from some legendary LA restaurants. We could only marvel at the prices—a full halibut dinner at the Brown Derby in 1951 for \$3.75! Today, you need to move the decimal point — halibut at my farmer's market goes for \$37.50 a pound!

The Rare Books Reading Room is open to the public, but you must arrange for a reservation. Go to the Central Library website, and select the Rare Book Collection <https://www.lapl.org/branches/central-library/departments/rare-books> to reserve a time between 9 and 5 on weekdays. Mention something specific you want see or read and the librarian will make sure it's available for you. Or reserve a time to just go and read. It's worth a trip - the rooms is in the original 1920s wing of the Central Library and the architecture and furnishing are authentically of the period. It's like being invited to read in a well-appointed private library in some very rich person's elegant home out of the long ago past.



What to Do with Apricots in 1762 - Such Beautiful Penmanship

If you didn't know about the CH book group, you do now and you're welcome to join! Sometimes we read a book and discuss it or cook from it and report on the results; sometimes we pick a topic — like "Old Kitchen Gadgets" or "Tomatoes" — and share what we know about the subject, either firsthand or through research. There are no dues; there's not a lot of outside reading, and what there is, is not required. It's not school (although we learn a lot), you can listen and chat even if you haven't done any homework.

If you'd like to participate, send a request to Cathy at: cathy.behrens@gmail.com and you'll be on the mailing list for the next meeting in 2023.



Ellen Sandler, television writer (Co-Exec. Producer, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and author of *The TV Writers Workbook*). She cooks every day and the colder weather inspired a white bean, cabbage and tomato soup — no recipe, just what was in the kitchen. While stirring the pot she likes to listen to an audiobook, usually about food and cooking. Most recently: *Food Politics* by Marion Nestle.

A Letter from the Editor

When we speak of culinary history, it's easy to envision the stories of famous dishes, legendary chefs, and the evolution of specific ethnic cuisines. It's always fascinating and informative stuff, yet there's also more to explore about things that aren't typically considered.



In this issue, we take a brief look at some affiliated, often overlooked, elements that surround our relationship with food: the history of food delivery, takeout boxes, and the broader cultural aspects nuanced within the seemingly simple and ubiquitous pink donut box. The more we learn and investigate, the fuller I hope we can understand and celebrate our shared enjoyment of food history.

Sharon

Would you like to get more involved with CHSC? We're looking for a Special Events Chair! If interested, contact membership@chsocal.org

ROOTING FOR CARROTS

Carrots were first used for medicine in Asia over 3,000 years ago. These carrots were very different from the carrots we see now — they were purple and yellow! It was not until 900 B.C. when carrots were

first grown for food in Afghanistan. Purple and yellow carrots did not make their way to Western Europe until the 1300s.

Orange carrots did not come on to the scene until much later. It is said that the orange carrot was developed in Holland as a tribute to William of Orange during the Dutch fight for independence. However, its popularity was likely due to the fact that the new orange carrot was less bitter than the purple and red varieties.



The pilgrims brought orange carrot seeds with them when they settled in the United States. They shared the seeds with American Indians who, along with west-bound settlers, planted carrots across the country. Today orange carrots are still the most popular variety of carrots in the United States.

FUN FACTS

- To achieve a perfect orange color, carrots should be grown between 60-75 F.
- Carrots are a type of root vegetable—meaning the edible portion of the plant is grown underground.
- Carrots are related to celery, dill, fennel, parsley, and parsnip.
 - European ladies would wear lacy carrot flowers in their hair in the 15th century.
 - California grows the most carrots in the US.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Fact Sheet: Carrot: <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/school-nutrition/pdf/fact-sheet-carrot.pdf>

The Culinary Historians of Southern California www.chsocal.org



President: Charles Perry
Vice President - Programs: Nancy Zaslavsky
Vice President - Membership: Sheila Anderzunaz
Treasurer: Cynthia Phung
Secretary: Hae Jung Cho
Media Relations: Flo Selfman
Library Liaisons: Ani Boyadjian & Stella Mittelbach
Newsletter Editor/Art Director: Sharon Tani
Questions? Contact: membership@chsocal.org

Ex Libris Dan Strehl By Stella Mittelbach, CHSC Library Liaison

The latest antiquarian book acquisition by the Culinary Historians of Southern California for Los Angeles Public Library is the Dan Strehl Collection. Many long-time members know Dan Strehl as one of the librarians who co-founded the CHSC after the famous fire gutted Central Library's cookery collection.

He is an expert on foodways of Mexico, California, and the Southwest. He authored several books and translated the first cookbook written by a Hispanic person in the United States, *Encarnación's kitchen: Mexican recipes from nineteenth-century California: selections from Encarnación Pinedo's El cocinero español*. Post retirement, Dan Strehl is living in Arizona and decided to put his personal collection up for auction.



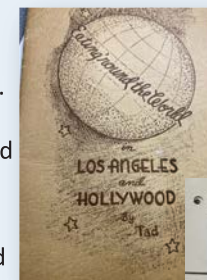
Photo: Gary Leonard Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

The CHSC purchased 47 titles including:

Eating 'round the world in Los Angeles, Hollywood & Vicinity Tad Cronquist, 1939

This rare 22 page guidebook lists the "more interesting restaurants and cafes" of the day. Entries describe the food, ambience, and clientele. Occasionally typical prices are listed as well.

Here is a sample: "The Downtowner, frequented by Rudy Vallee and Edgar "Charlie McCarthy" Bergen. This is a good place for dinner, a drink between acts or an after the theater snack. The bar is chummy and cosy and cocktails are mixed by barkeepers who are experts. Dinner about \$1.00. 319 West Sixth Street"



Bohemian Life (periodical) 1939-1950

This acquisition fills in most of the large gaps in LAPL's holdings for this periodical.

Bohemian Life was an influential early gourmet newsletter published in Los Angeles. According to the bookseller Omnivore Books, "*Bohemian Life* was possibly the first regularly issued food publication in California, and it tracks the evolution of the gastronomic sensibilities of the era not just in Southern California but beyond. Its editor, publishing under the nom de plume of 'Savarin St. Sure', was the polymath Phil Townsend Hanna, a founder of the Los Angeles Wine & Food Society, and the longtime editor of *Westways* magazine,



who gave a young M.F.K. Fisher her first paid writing commission. Covering such diverse topics as wine; bibulatory etiquette; uniquely Californian ingredients and dishes; restaurants and hotels; book reviews; cocktail recipes; holiday celebrations; and much more"

Choice Recipes Ladies of the Guild of the Church of St. Matthew, San Mateo, CA. 1897

This charitable cookbook from a town on the San Francisco peninsula features many French recipes such as Eggs a la Bordelaise, Halibut Steak a la Flamande, and Chicken and Oysters a la Metropole.

Some recipes are for the thrifty using potatoes and "force meat," (ground meat or chicken mixed with spices, egg, flour, and onion) and other recipes call for more slightly unusual ingredients such as terrapin, duck, and varieties of shellfish. (Full text available at <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/17843059.html>)

Cosmopolitan Recipes Woman's Improvement Club (Saint Helena, CA), 1905

Some of the recipes that catch one's eye in this charitable cookbook are Soup from Chicken Feet, Pompano Fish, Currant Catsup, Mustard Chow Chow, Bohemian Cheese, Apricot Meringue Pie, Amber Pudding, Harrison Pudding, Queso de Membrillo, Tamarind Water, and Anchovy Butter. The book has advertising with artful illustrations throughout (Full text available at <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/21082068.html>)

Thanks to the CHSC membership for continuing to support Los Angeles Public Library's collections!

CHSC Book Group meets in person for the first time

Article and photos by Flo Selfman

On a drizzly, gray afternoon in early December, seven members of CHSC's Book Group gathered at the large, lovely meeting space at Liz Thompson's Pasadena residence to usher in the season, finally see/meet each other in person after two years, share recipes, and swap stories. From the moment we entered, we were enveloped in warmth and good cheer, courtesy of our host Liz, who had prepared in advance with wines and homemade lemonade, the "good dishes and silver," food-themed gift bags for all, and even organized a gift exchange.

Our challenge and theme were to find a historical holiday recipe and bring it along with the prepared dish.

Our starter was truffle pate and crackers from Liz. Everyone set about prepping their dishes — the space had a complete kitchen so we were able to heat, stir, and whatever else was required. The large counter was filled with dishes savory and sweet and we each described our creations before serving ourselves and moving over to the round table.

Dishes included:

- **Cathy Behrens:** *Leek and Feta Fritters*, lovely with a hint of mint.
- **Dhanya Eisenstein:** *Kasha Varnishkes*, a traditional Jewish dish with bowtie noodles (farfalle), onions and buckwheat groats (kasha). Dhanya's authentic touch was homemade schmaltz (rendered chicken fat).
- **Flo Selfman:** *21st Century Tsimmes*. A traditional Jewish stew usually served at Passover. Flo's version was topped with a mixture of toasted walnuts, lemon juice, chopped figs and fresh mint.
- **Mary Jo Uniack:** *Historic Stuffed Peppers* from 1896 Fannie Farmer cookbook. Mary Jo substituted quinoa for rice and added ground turkey and cheese to the colorful red and green bell peppers.
- Sweets included, from **Ellen Sandler:** *Pfeffernusse* — traditional small German Christmas cookies, usually coated with powdered sugar. Ellen's

special touch was plum glaze.

- From host **Liz:** *Sevillum*, an ancient Roman cheesecake. Liz topped hers with poppy seeds.
- And from **Tania Norris, Syllabub**, a whipped cream dessert, typically flavored with white wine or sherry, a popular British confection from 16th-19th centuries. Each parfait dish used a different variety of fresh mint, so we each sampled all of them.
- Interesting note: three of the seven dishes included fresh mint.

Started by **Cathy Behrens** and **Chelley Maple** in November 2020 to offer "reading, food, friendship and fascination," the CHSC Book Group, a benefit of membership, launches a new format in 2023. As Cathy revealed, we'll meet in person every other month, with the host choosing the theme, providing the venue, and organizing the event. Tania Norris hosted February 12 at her home in Altadena. The theme: dishes considered aphrodisiac.

The next gathering will be in April. For CHSC Book Group information, contact cathy.behrens@gmail.com.



Flo Selfman is a Los Angeles-based copy editor and PR consultant. She is a board member of Culinary Historians, handles media relations, is on the Hospitality committee, and was CHSC's March 2021 program presenter. She wrote about DTLA's La Plaza Cocina for the Summer 2012 issue. Flo loves exploring LA, always with camera in hand.

www.WordsalaMode.com

THE TASTY HISTORY OF TAKEOUT & DELIVERY

Once upon a time, eating out meant going to the food, not food coming to you.

By Caitlyn Hitt

Restaurants and food to-go have been around since Ancient Rome. Like Rome, however, delivery wasn't created in a day. The first delivery didn't happen for more than a thousand years. Crazy, right? Sorry, Caesar. Takeout and delivery have become such a normal part of our lives that it's almost impossible to imagine life without it.

The first food delivery takes place in Naples, Italy in 1889. King Umberto and Queen Margherita demand Faralee Esposito deliver them a pizza pie from Pizzeria di Pietro e Basta Così, now a legendary location. He agrees and food delivery -- and Margherita pizza -- are born. Sort of, anyway. The following year, a Bombay businessman starts a lunch delivery service through which he provides blue-collar workers all over the city lunch daily.

Delivery is slow to catch on, but things are changing. In 1922, Kin-Chu cafe opens in Los Angeles. The eatery runs an ad alleging that it's "the only place on the West Coast making and delivering real Chinese dishes." Kin-Chu is the first United States restaurant to offer this service and people love it. Unfortunately, it's ahead of its time.

In 1929 the stock market crashes and in 1930, the Great Depression hits. Suddenly, no one's interested in takeout or delivery because they can't afford it. To make matters worse, through the 1940s the world is at war and people are too worried about that and their own survival to want food delivered. That is, until 1944, when *The New York Times* explains pizza to its readers for the first time.

The war ends in 1945 and American soldiers return home. Millions of Americans start settling into a new, more comfortable life. They ditch the city for the suburbs and plant themselves on the couch in front of the TV as much as possible. They also decide there's no need to go out to restaurants when they could be eating in front of the tube. This leads to some serious struggles for restaurants across the country, which pushes them to turn to takeout and delivery. These services go from novelty to norm in no time.

By the 1950s, pizza catches on. Better late than never, right? Los Angeles' iconic Casa D'Amore pops up in Los Angeles, offering free delivery on any order over \$2.50. It's widely considered the first pizza place to do this. Looks like LA was ahead of the delivery curve.

Fast forward to the 1990s, Pizza Hut launches Pizzanet. It doesn't allow anyone anywhere to order delivery pizza, but it does work for people in Santa Cruz, which is pretty revolutionary for the time. Pizzanet is actually one of the first websites on the internet, meaning pizza is probably the first good bought and sold online.

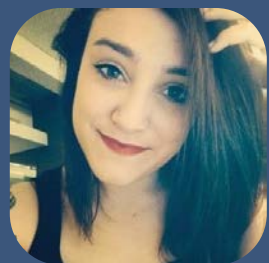
A year later, in 1995, WorldWideWaiter launches at Waiter.com. It's widely considered the first online restaurant delivery service. It operates strictly out of the Bay Area, but features more than 60 different restaurants. In 1999, a group of New York businessmen launch SeamlessWeb.

Presumably, they were tired of the West Coast being able to order food from whatever restaurants to their homes but not them. In 2004, GrubHub is founded in Chicago. The following year, Seamless starts allowing individuals to use the service. They also cut "Web" from the name.

In 2011, Seamless and GrubHub stop competing with each other and merge. The competition isn't over, though. In 2013, DoorDash launches and in 2014, Uber Eats launches. Nowadays, those three companies account for 80% of all online food deliveries. Nearly every major city in the world has some type of online delivery platform available and Americans love it. Currently, they're spending about \$16 billion per month on takeout and delivery.

Sometimes you just want to enjoy a restaurant-quality meal in the comfort of your home. Queen Margherita understood that and we're eternally grateful to her for helping bring about takeout and delivery. Next time you're eating your favorite restaurant dish in your undies, pour a little out for the queen.

Caitlyn Hitt is a journalist focusing on pop culture, travel, and A-list celebrity news. Her work has been featured in *Thrillist*, *Playboy*, and more.



Charles Perry, What's Spanish about Espagnole? Continued from Page 1

("Olio" also became the name for a miscellaneous vaudeville of variety acts performed during a theater intermission, a sense that survived fitfully into the 20th century.)

But was *olla podrida* really native to Spain? I suspect not. I think it was originally North African. Before the Arab invasions of the 7th century, North Africa was the land of the Berbers, an ancient people who never established a state of their own; the closest they got was to assemble big tribal confederations. In the 13th century, when our two surviving Spanish Arab cookbooks were written, the leading confederation was the Sanhaja, and both books give recipes for dishes called *sanhaji*. They are essentially huge protein blowouts -- mutton, beef, chicken and as many game birds as you could get your hands on. Just the thing, I imagine, to serve at a jamboree of Sanhaja big-shots. You could add some vegetables, as in a modern *olla podrida*, though "royal" *sanhaji* was all meat.

Sanhaji/olla podrida could be cooked in various ways, but it is clear that the multiple meats were used as the basis for a sauce. In *The British Housewife* (1756), Mrs. Martha Bradley revealed the secret sauce of a London restaurant named The Old Spanish Gentleman: ham, beef and lamb fried with vegetables until the juices were nearly evaporated, then simmered with a roux for 45 minutes and strained. And flavored with garlic, in this case.

Aha -- a *sauce espagnole*. Or should we call it *sauce berbère*?

Nancy Zaslavsky, Program Notes: Continued from Page 1

19th centuries. Lenore Newman marched us into the holidays with December's entertaining "Poutine on Mars: Culinary Traditions in Unusual Places" where she discussed how Canadian cuisine changed though place and time with specific dishes and how they became a big part of national identity.

If you've been purchasing items on Amazon Smile as a fundraising tool for CHSC, thank you. Amazon recently decided to cancel its tax deduction program while downsizing. It seems we're too smalltime for the giant, but it was good while it lasted.

Whaddaya mean you're not a CHSC member? Get on the ball and join already! A measly \$30 per year wins you all the joys and benefits of true membership. Join right away and you'll be included the coveted March 2023 members directory.

The Hidden Histories of To-Go Container Art

By Anne Ewbank

In a diner last week, a waitress briskly slid me a platter of pancakes. On the blaring TV, reporters were asking shoppers what they thought about New Jersey's new law banning single-use plastic and paper bags. "One of the strictest in the nation," intoned a newscaster.

As I struggled to finish my pancakes, I listened to him explain how that law also extends to styrofoam takeout boxes. Just before I left, the waitress even offered me one: the classic white clamshell.

Personally, I support a ban on styrofoam boxes. Not only are they bad for the environment, but they're also ... boring.

"But Annie," you ask, "aren't all takeout containers boring?" No! For this job, I've chatted with avid collectors of elaborately printed pizza boxes and gazed at plastic sushi containers collected by the Smithsonian.

Takeout containers—especially for pizza, Chinese food, and sushi—have an iconic art and style. Granted, it's not always the most elegant or politically correct, but some of these designs are now instantly recognizable. So, today, we investigate the origins of the smiling chef of pizza-box fame, the ubiquitous red pagoda of American-Chinese takeout, and the surprising elegance of plastic sushi trays.

The Winking Chef

Several years ago, I interviewed Scott Weiner, the owner of the world's largest pizza-box collection. His boxes, which are brand new and grease-free, range from Domino's boxes shaped like R2-D2 to fancy pizza places' stern white boxes embellished only with minimalist black text.

My favorite pizza-box motif, though, is the Winking Chef. This piece of clip art has graced millions of pizza boxes over the years: a jolly-looking man in a high chef's hat, winking, with his hand raised in an "a-ok" gesture. You've likely seen a similar man printed on take-out menus, or as a statuette outside restaurants holding a list of specials.

But who first set pen to paper and drew this self-satisfied cook? Weiner dove into researching his origins, noting along the way that the chef, though instantly recognizable, is often modified—sometimes winking, other times only knowingly raising an eyebrow.

One day, Weiner stumbled upon the Holy Grail: a pizza box printed with a signed illustration. The chef on this box wasn't winking, and he held a slice of pizza rather than making any kind of gesture. It was the work of American cartoonist Gill Fox, who in his 20th-century heyday was twice nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

In Fox's 2004 obituary, the *New York Times* claimed that "the betoqued chef, winking and making an A-OK" sign was his work, even though the signed illustration Weiner found featured neither winking nor the gesture. The standard clip-art chef seems much more crudely drawn than Fox's work, though the chef's hat, kerchief, and mustache are suspiciously similar.

Fox is said to have drawn the chef in the early 1950s, copying the style of a co-worker and selling it to a clip-art service as a joke. Perhaps the chef underwent plastic surgery by pen over the years, tweaked by other artists. Today, said chef is an implicit promise—from pizza place to customer—that good food awaits inside the box.

The Porcelain Pagoda

The Chinese takeout box is a marvel of engineering. Descended from 19th-century oyster pails, the folded, waxed-paperboard design was patented by Frederick Weeks Wilcox in 1894, and has changed very little since. For most of the 1900s, the little box was plain and white. That changed in the 1970s.



Who drew this ubiquitous image?

According to *The New York Times*, a designer at what is now Fold-Pak decided to add a red line drawing of a pagoda onto the side. The take-out container manufacturer also added the words "Thank You" and "Enjoy," in what is now derisively known as "wonton" font, letters used in 20th-century American marketing that mimicked the strokes of Chinese calligraphy.

The designer is unknown to this day, but it's now rare to see a Chinese takeout box without the red pagoda and faux calligraphy.

A few years ago, Xinhua, the official state newspaper of the People's Republic of China, published an article explaining the containers, which are a common sight in American shows and movies but non-existent in China itself.

The image, according to Xinhua, is the Porcelain Tower, a pagoda constructed in 15th-century Nanjing. The 9-story, 260-foot-tall edifice, walled with glazed porcelain bricks, was considered a marvel both in China and abroad. In the West, some writers held it as one of the seven wonders of the Middle Ages, a category that includes both the Hagia Sofia and the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Sadly, the original tower fell victim to the chaos of the Taiping Rebellion in 1856, when rebels razed it to the ground. If that long-forgotten Fold-Pak designer truly did use it as a model for their shorter, simpler tower, they must have referred to old images of the building drawn by Chinese and European artists.

But the Porcelain Tower stands again today. In 2015, the Chinese government completed a full-size replica in a Nanjing park devoted to the building's history and importance.

Sushi Spectacle

Sushi is fresh fish prepared by artists with sharp knives and sold for hundreds of dollars at chefs' tables; it's also trays of imitation crab rolls sitting under buzzing fluorescent lights in convenience stores.

The second style of sushi, though, still retains some elegance, largely thanks to its presentation: in a gleaming, decorated plastic tray with a clear lid. Many plastic sushi trays, if made out of wood instead, would be quite lovely. Which is the origin of their appealing design—they're based on traditional Japanese plates.

"The colored tray often comes with printed embellishments, replicating the types of designs commonly found on Japanese dishware, making it a critical feature in effectively marketing the product as Japanese," reads the National Museum of American History website.

Popular motifs include mountain scenes, flowers, brocade patterns, red maple leaves, and temari balls, which represent youth, friendship, and the New Year.

Your average sushi tray is black, with deep-red and gold flourishes—an imitation of Japanese lacquered dishware, or *urushi*. Black, red, and gold are the most common colors in lacquerware production, which is a truly ancient art, dating back to the Neolithic era. (Real wooden lacquerware is phenomenally expensive and can even be gilded with real gold.)

The NMAH actually owns a collection of plastic sushi trays, many of which were produced by the Advanced Fresh Concepts Corporation. Founded by Ryuji Ishii, who longed for accessible sushi in the United States, the company was the first to pre-package and ship large quantities of sushi to American stores. Ishii succeeded in making sushi ubiquitous, and, as extra credit, made these plastic versions of fine dishware just as common.

Anne Ewbank is Gastro Obscura's senior associate editor, where she focuses on culinary history and ephemera.

This article first appeared on Atlas Obscura. ©Atlas Obscura Incorporated. Reprinted by special permission.



Plastic sushi trays can be extremely elaborate.



Your Chinese takeout containers likely look like this.

Gabriel Saldana/CC BY-SA 2.0



Ever notice how in TV and movies doughnuts always seem to come in pink boxes? The ubiquitous soft-pink cake box's origins harken back to Southern California in the 1980s but also to a Cambodian refugee's business acumen.

Besides In-N-Out, tofu, and tacos, SoCal, it turns out, really loves doughnuts. Though the Instagram posts from your friends in LA might suggest they never indulge in the fried sweet awesomeness, there is a doughnut store for every 7,000 Angelenos, while the ratio is 30,000 people to a shop in most of the rest of the US (that same love of doughnuts might explain all the hiking pics, too, just saying).

Unlike New England, there's no one dominant brand in the Southland. Winchell's Donuts, founded in 1948, is the largest single branded chain on the West Coast. However, they only count 170 locations company-wide; that includes five other states and US territory Guam and commonwealth Saipan. Californians don't run on Dunkin' or Krispy Kreme either. Instead, independent, usually family-run shops dot the sprawling landscape.

These small businesses trace their roots to one Cambodian immigrant, Ted Ngoy. Ngoy is most commonly known as "Uncle Ted" to the

with just family members, avoiding payroll costs, thus retaining more revenue.

Eventually, the families leasing the doughnut shops would become successful enough following Uncle Ted's formula owned their stores. However, Ted's severe gambling addiction also accelerated their independence, forcing him to sell his éclair empire as massive debts grew. Despite his personal demons, these business owners kept to Ngoy's template for success, seeing value in following his professional example.

Keeping the business in the family wasn't the only tactic these new stores followed. They also made sure to use quality ingredients, find other ways to cut costs, and increase profits. This quest to keep expenses low led to one doughnut shop owner asking bakery supplier Westco for a box more inexpensive than the long white pastry case. Using leftover pink



THE HISTORY OF THE PINK DOUGHNUT BOX, AKA, THE '994'

by Rudy Sanchez

for all the stores. Pink was also more popular than white, as the former was closer to red, a color symbolizing luck, and the latter was associated with death by many Cambodian owners.

Pink 994 boxes wouldn't just come to represent doughnuts and become the defacto packaging for those tasty morsels; doughnut brands with no connection to the Cambodian doughnut shop operators or Ted Ngoy have adopted the packaging. Beloved Portland-based Voodoo Doughnuts and Nevada's Pinkbox Doughnuts (of course) are newer doughnut brands that have also incorporated the pink box into their branding.

The pink boxes also symbolize the success of many Cambodian refugees arriving in the United States when Americans were more welcoming to refugees fleeing oppression and seeking freedom and opportunity. These

help out barely taller than the store's counter—come back to the family business, and in the process, modernize the market, straying from Uncle Ted's template to appeal to a new generation of consumers. The current doughnut generation brings new flavors such as matcha frosting and taro fillings. Vegan options exist, as well as pastries decorated to stand out on social media. They also utilize their skills learned from attending college, an opportunity afforded them thanks to the financial success of their parents.

But that same entrepreneurial know-how and social media savviness may also spell the demise of the "994." Looking to differentiate and stand out in Mark Zuckerberg's pits of hell and misery, many of those new store operators are dropping the traditional soft-pink boxes for something bespoke and professionally designed. Some, of course, are retaining the pink hue in their branding, acknowledging the strong connection the color has with doughnuts, but making it a part of their branding strategy.

The new generation adds to Uncle Ted's formula for success things like social media engagement, experiential marketing, and professionally designed brand identities. These updates serve to keep Ted Ngoy's legacy as the Donut King alive, competitors like Dunkin' at bay, and



There is a doughnut store for every 7,000 Angelenos, while the ratio is 30,000 people to a shop in most of the rest of the US.

The pink boxes also symbolize the success of many Cambodian refugees arriving in the United States when Americans were more welcoming to refugees fleeing oppression and seeking freedom and opportunity.

hundreds that sought refuge in America following the fall of Pol Pot's regime. Uncle Ted set up these families with doughnut shops in Southern California by leasing stores to them, taking a cut of the profits, and becoming a maple bar mogul while supporting his community.

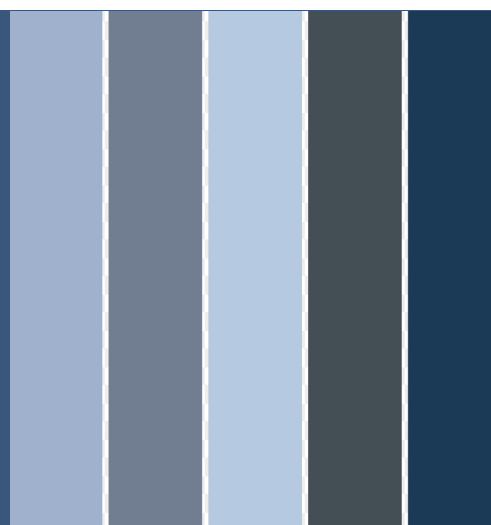
Before Ted Ngoy became the "Donut King," he was an army general in Cambodia when Phnom Penh fell in 1975 and managed to flee as the Khmer Rouge overtook the government. Arriving at a refugee center outside San Diego, Ngoy found work thanks to his pastor sponsor. While at his gas station job, Ngoy noticed the doughnut shop across the street was bustling, even late at night. That observation led him to join the minority program at doughnut chain Winchell's, then the dominant doughnut player in SoCal. After managing a Newport Beach spot, Ngoy started his chain of doughnut shops named after his wife, Christy.

Starting with nothing in a foreign land, Ted would soon be living a lavish life, vacationing worldwide, owning mansions, and driving expensive cars. He also became a fixture in the Orange County Republican Party. Those political connections and his previous role as a Cambodian general meant that the US embassy in Bangkok, Thailand, would reach out to him, asking Ted to sponsor family members that escaped Cambodia at the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. He took in his refugee family, leading to more sponsorships of Cambodian refugees—by his estimate, Ngoy helped more than 100 families start a new life in America, providing them with an economic opportunity with his doughnut store leasing program. Uncle Ted mentored and taught these immigrants, eventually setting them up as store operators and splitting the profits with the families. Many also followed Uncle Ted's example and ran their stores

cardstock, the firm created a 9x9x4 inch box, perfect for a dozen doughnuts. The package was a few pennies cheaper than the white version, which may not seem like much, but for shops selling hundreds, sometimes thousands, of dozens a week, those pennies added up.

The "994" (as those in the doughnut game refer to the box) quickly became popular with Cambodian shop operators in the 80s. The introduction of the pink box also coincides with the take over of the market by Ted Ngoy's proteges. As this network of independent Cambodian doughnut shops dominated California, they decimated Winchell's market share. They also extinguished any lingering west coast ambitious fledgling transplanted Dunkin' had left. Despite being a uniquely regional custom, the 994 would become a part of Hollywood's prop repertoire and cement its walk-on pop culture status.

Since these independent shops had all learned the business from Uncle Ted, they all had consistent menus and produced doughnuts using similar baking techniques and equipment. If a dozen doughnuts fit inside a pink 994 neatly in one Cambodian doughnut shop, odds were it worked



immigrant store operators have become so beloved by the community of doughnut lovers in SoCal that no large brand can dislodge these independents from the region. Contenders like Dunkin', Krispy Kreme, and Starbucks, to some extent, have all entered the doughnut Thunderdome with middling success, at best. As of this writing, Dunkin' operates only 121 stores in all of California, a paltry presence when one considers there are over 1,500 doughnut shops in Los Angeles alone.

Ted Ngoy's gambling addiction would lead him to declare bankruptcy, eventually returning to live in Cambodia. Having gone rags-to-riches-to-rags, Ted returned to his political ambitions, this time making a go of it in his homeland with mixed results. While working as an advisor on commerce and agriculture to Prime Minister Hun Sen, he would engage in an extramarital affair with a younger woman. His infidelity would be the final betrayal Christy would endure, and she

divorced Ted in 1999.

Ngoy's doughnut empire thrives without him, however. Many of the children that worked in these doughnut shops—some starting to

continuing proof that America is made better by receiving industrious, freedom-seeking immigrants, especially when they come to make delicious doughnuts.



Rudy Sanchez is a product marketing consultant based in Southern California. Once described by a friend as her "technology life coach," he is a techie and avid lifelong gamer. When he's not writing or helping clients improve their products, he's either watching comedies on Netflix, playing the latest shooter or battle royale game or out exploring the world via Ingress and Pokémon Go.

Sidebar: Pink donut boxes are a canvas for artist portraying kids of Cambodian-American refugees



Exploring the complexities of Southeast Asian refugee communities through cultural perception and representation, Los Angeles artist Phung Huynh created an exhibition titled "Donut (W)hole" that features portraits drawn and painted on iconic pink donut boxes.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/03/22/1087168493/pink-donut-boxes-are-canvas-for-artist-portraying-kids-of-cambodian-american-ref>