

unity



Celebrating Food, Art & Culture

Asian Pacific American Heritage Issue
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How sweet the sound



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Constant state of creativity

Could there be a better accompaniment to a confectionary company than a blog about food?

Five years ago, Brooklyn, N.Y.-based Whimsy & Spice began selling brownies, cookies and marshmallows at the Brooklyn Flea Market. Sweetfineday.com provided the perfect digital complement. And it's been one sweet ride for both endeavors since then.

Customers can now purchase Whimsy & Spice products online and in specialty shops. And Sweetfineday.com has evolved into a popular repository of news about Whimsy & Spice, the author's musings on life and a collection of eye-catching photos.

Pastry chef Mark Sopchak and his wife, Jenna Park, run Whimsy & Spice, but Sweetfineday.com is Park's baby. It details her experiences while growing up (she was born in South Korea) and their impact on how she raises the couple's two grade-school daughters, Claudine and Mia.

Undergrad degrees in fine art from The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, and in music from The Evergreen State College, capped off by a master's in interactive telecommunications from New York University, are among the factors that contribute to Park's roles as art director and "food entrepreneur." Out of all her current experiences, though, perhaps the one she's most recognized for is Sweetfineday.com. At least for now.

"I've spent as much as six to eight hours on a single post," Park explains in an email. "I do have a propensity to write long, rambling



"There never seem to be enough hours in the day!" says art director/blogger/photographer Jenna Park.

blog posts." Judging from the discussions and comments on her blog, her lengthy observations are well-received.

Park is certainly not "desk-bound."

"Every day is a little bit different depending on the freelance work and deadlines that I have on my plate," she reveals. The one thing that is consistent and governs our lives is our kids' schedules ... Each day is a juggling act from fulfilling orders to meeting deadlines to managing the kids' after school activities and homework. ..."

Three years ago, Park unveiled her documentary photo series, "The Mixed Race Project."

"The first three families that I launched the project with were friends of mine who I had asked and who graciously volunteered, but every family after that were people who contacted me directly. ... I didn't actively solicit families to participate – they came to me, mostly through word of mouth and through the blog."

Park is fond of turning her lens not only on people but landscapes (particularly the Pacific Northwest and New York City) and – of course – Whimsy & Spice products. However, it takes a great deal of effort to coax her from behind her Canon 5D Mark II and her iPhone.

"I'm not really comfortable in front of a camera," says the inveterate photographer. "(And) I don't understand the selfie obsession."



Jenna Park and her husband, Mark Sopchak.
Photos by Carolyn Fong

How sweet the sound



"I think I've gone through nearly 10 (ukuleles) since I started playing back in 1994," says Ben Ahn.
Photos by Jerek Barcelona of Jerek Barcelona Vision Photography

You'd never guess what one gifted musician sometimes treasures the most at the end of the day.

"This may sound strange, and I'm curious as to whether or not other musicians feel this way, but ... when I have time to relax, sometimes the sound I value most is silence. Uncluttered, simple, reflective silence."

Yep, the highly dexterous Ben Ahn, who can strike up just about any type of tune on his ukulele, is also a sucker for silence. But Ahn's growing base of fans needn't worry about being deprived of the pleasure of his strumming and crooning. Ahn can't imagine a life devoid of music. After all, he dabbles "in just about everything that makes noise," including a broken rubber band.

Ahn, 33, arrived in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2013. "I was at a place personally where I was ready for exploration," he says about the move. "San Francisco has a great professional and artistic scene, and I'm really pleased with how" things have gone.

A 2014 article in Hyphen magazine said he planned to work on a recording in 2014, so we wondered where things stood with this project.

"Since moving to the Bay Area last year, I've had a lot of informal conversations with different studios, but the project is still barely past the genesis stage," Ahn told *Unity* earlier this year. "Still writing, still exploring and still looking for a means to get the sound I want down to production."

Half Chinese and half Korean, Ahn hails from a family of entertainers in Kauai. "My sisters, Jackie and Sara, are the same – and they both sing a lot better than I do – and my mama, Jennie, claims to have no musical talent, but she sang to us all the time growing up. My dad, Nolan, sings and plays just about every instrument you typically see on a rock stage."

On stage, Ahn dabbles in rock and nearly every other style and genre his audience members might favor. His YouTube video, "Ben Ahn: Versatility of the Ukulele," (www.youtube.com/watch?v=dX-hA5CEGUc0&list=UUdQDTvTc4g4NiE1YCbKzFw), capsulizes his eclectic range.

It's probably no surprise that this singer-songwriter has an affinity for storytelling. After all, he's an award-winning educator (he even taught English in Japan), with a master's in teaching and bachelor's in English and writing from Oregon State University.

But what are the sources of his storytelling talent? The first is "the culture of Hawaii. Back home in Kauai, we don't have much external stimulation other than the beach, so I think a lot of us really place value on *talking story*, or conversation. It's how we make a parking lot, a friend's garage or the supermarket such fun places to be."

The second source is "my inflated ego," he jokes. "I think I assume that people want to hear what I have to say, and being a musician only feeds that monster."

Some will surely argue that the only thing monstrous about Ahn is his talent.



"I love the dynamic about music in that there is no shortcut to excellence." - Ben Ahn

A contemporary tribute to tradition



For more information on our cultural fine art collection, visit www.picture-that.com. Picture That, LLC

The works by the three artists chosen for this issue of *Unity* exemplify the strength and passion indicative of their Asian heritage. Their works convey messages of Western influence and lifestyles, yet maintain connections to and respect for their Asian roots.

SHARK TOOF

Shark Toof is a Chinese-American artist who has established his visual calling card, a wheat paste, hand-drawn shark head, as his logo and is recognized for his graffiti street art and his works on canvas. Toof says his art process relates to his heritage.

Toof describes his work as “saturated with bold color, tension of composition and use of spatial relationships.” Using acrylic and spray paint on canvas, Toof’s work reveals parallels of Asian culture,



“Boy, Girl and Two Wolves Show” by Shark Toof

yet is driven by vintage-like portrayals of American males and females with facial features replaced by bursts of energy. His piece, “Boy, Girl and Two Wolves Show,” was inspired by a trip to Southeast Asia where a strong American influence was present. “The painting shows a mutual embrace while decisions are contemplated and the wolves’ mouths (nature) represents the ultimate answer,” says Toof.

“Girl and Tiger Show” is a juxtaposition of the question, Which is the predator and which is the prey? “Boy, Three Girls and Tiger Show” has “many questions,” Toof says, “from unraveling the title of the piece to arms and grasping hands that seem to appear from out of nowhere.”

Toof also collaborates with other artists with his art and designs of sharks to raise awareness of shark and ocean habitat conservation.

JAYANTHI MOORTHY

Jayanthi Moorthy is a Brooklyn-based artist born and raised in India. Her art career began as an interior designer and a character animator of 3-D graphics.

Many of Moorthy’s works are created on unstretched pieces of canvas and cloth with the use of mixed media such as paper, rice flour, acrylic paint and flowers. The heavy textures and printed paper in the center of “Making Sense” are surrounded by



“Girl and Tiger Show” by Shark Toof



“Boy, Three Girls and Tiger Show” by Shark Toof



"In the Moment," "Making Sense," "The Testament"
by Jayanthi Moorthy

a combination of deep and bright reds. Moorthy says this piece is her personal reflection on religion, culture and life and spearheaded a series of works called Ceremonial Lines. She says "In the Moment" was inspired by nature and the explosion of springtime color. The calligraphy and dots symbolize a Sanskrit daily prayer and the foot binding worn by Asian women, respectively. The white and red horizontal lines in "The Testament" are inspired by the sacred markings on the forehead of Indian men and women: white for ashes and red for saffron.

"I draw inspiration from Asian culture and its age-old rituals and ceremonies, which has been the biggest influence in my choice of medium, themes, materials and process," says Moorthy. "They fascinate me not just because of their aesthetic appeal but also (their) ephemeral nature." Moorthy's work has been exhibited in New Delhi and the New York City area.

ARTHUR LIU

Arthur Liu grew up in an artistic family and says he has been in love with fine arts since childhood. At a young age, his father, a calligraphist and artist, taught him

to express his thoughts and imaginations on paper. Liu attended the Guangzhou (Gawn-szoh) Academy of Fine Arts in China and in 1984, then left for the United States to continue his studies in fine art. He earned a master's degree in fine arts from The City College of New York in 1990 and began his career as an artist. After more than two decades of research and creation, Liu created a U.S. patent called Flowing Colors Oil Painting technique and the Flowing Colors Oil Paint. Under Liu's method, he combines the traditional Chinese water-and-ink technique with oil paint that artists were unable to accomplish in the past.

Liu, influenced by the conciseness of traditional Chinese paintings and the sense of freedom in contemporary Western art, brings the two together in an abstract depiction of natural scenes with motion and vitality. "Motherly Love" is an oil painting with a mix of sculpture, painting and installation art that represents a mother's love toward her child. "Thinker" utilizes the same technique and depicts a woman in front of a window. Inspired by his desire for peace and unity, "Peace of Love" shows affection between a man and a woman. When viewed up close, these three works have a marble-like look that reveals Liu's patented oil painting technique.

Liu is the only Chinese-American artist who has been granted patents in the art field in the United States. He's the founder of the Queens Art Education Center, which offers studies in fine arts and opportunities to pursue art as a career.



"Motherly Love," "Thinker," "Peace of Love" by Arthur Liu

The ultimate royal flush

If you can't stand the heat, steer clear of the Bhut Jolokia.

In Nagaland, a tribal homeland in northeast India, Bhut Jolokia is another name for what's more commonly referred to as Naga King Chili. Now, before you start bragging about how much heat you can handle, consider this:

Naga King Chili has ranged from 500,000 to 1.5 million Scoville heat units. (The Scoville number indicates how much dilution would be needed to render the heat imperceptible.) A chili that scores above 1 million SHU can claim the distinction of being "superhot." By comparison, a jalapeño is around 4,000 SHU. Typical Tabasco sauce ranges from 2,500 units to 5,000 Scoville units.

So you've managed to endure the discomfort associated with other chili peppers, such as an incendiary sensation in the mouth and a runny nose. Well, this champion of all spices is known for bringing mortals to their knees all over the globe. Literally. No longer the official hottest chili pepper on the planet, it still garners plenty of respect among the rabid "chiliheads" of the world.

For generations, the indigenous Naga King Chili has been a beloved part of northeast India's culture. It's consumed as a spice and coveted as a cure for gastrointestinal ailments. In fact, some in India believe it's a ghost chili that "burns away" ills. So maybe this is just what the doctor ordered for your tummy troubles. Or maybe not.



Bhut Salsa

- 2 dried Bhut Jolokia peppers
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 tablespoon white vinegar
- 1 (15-ounce) can whole tomatoes or fresh tomatoes
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt

Bring water and dried ghost pepper to a boil — let the pepper simmer for 5 minutes after boiling. In a food processor or blender, combine tomatoes, garlic and vinegar and puree.

Yield: 2 1/2 cups

The Naga King Chili
is grown in
northeast India.





A closer look at the fortune cookie

The curvature of a fortune cookie may bring to mind China and Chineseness, but in reality it's an iconic shape largely for Americans who can't seem to get enough of them.

There are wedding fortune cookies, Valentine's Day fortune cookies, chocolate-dipped fortune cookies, fortune cookie baby booties, fortune cookie vanity soaps, fortune cookie diamond jewelry - even dog fortune cookies.

Americans are often surprised to learn that the cookies are relatively unknown in China, where as an experiment, a writer handed out fortune cookies to passers-by to get their reactions.

Instinctively, they put the cookies whole in their mouths (you almost want to stop them). Once they crunch into them, they're puzzled to discover the paper fortune sometimes lodged in their teeth.

"Americans are so strange," they say. "Why are they putting pieces of paper in their cookies?"

Their reactions are no surprise since fortune cookies actually originate from Japan, where there are still small family-run bakeries in Kyoto that make the cookies by hand. Flavored with sesame and miso, they are bigger and browner than their American cousins. Fortune cookies were brought over to America by Japanese immigrants. They became popular shortly after World War II as they spread in Chinese restaurants.

Fortune cookies: invented by the Japanese, popularized by the Chinese and digested by Americans.

This article originally appeared in Hyphen magazine.

Fortune Cookies

- 2 egg whites, room temperature
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1/4 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 6 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 cup flour, sifted

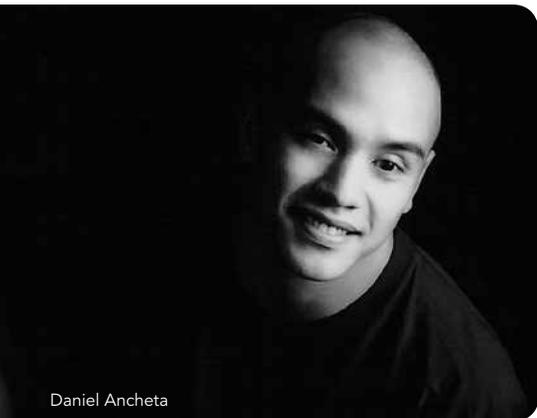
Cut a stencil out of a plastic coffee can lid in the shape of a 3-inch disk. Whip the egg whites until stiff and chill.

In a mixer, cream the butter, then add the sugar and continue mixing. Add the flour and blend in, then add the vanilla and blend again. Add the chilled egg whites and mix on low until well incorporated and the batter is smooth.

With a small offset spatula, spread batter through the stencil so it is a circle onto a silpat or parchment paper, about 6 per cookie sheet.

Bake in a preheated 350-degree oven until light golden brown, 7 to 8 minutes. Quickly remove the pan from the oven and, 1 at a time, place a fortune across the center with a bit hanging out. Fold cookie circle in thirds over fortune with flaps only slightly overlapping each other. Turn over and bring opposing sides together and pinch. Let cool.

Yield: 20 cookies



Daniel Ancheta

His idea of fitness is far from routine

Daniel Ancheta's portly exterior is long gone – much to his delight and the delight of his clients.

"My parents came from a culture ... when they might be worried if they would have enough to eat, so when food was plentiful, you indulged yourself," Ancheta says about his chubby childhood days. "With me, my mother made sure that I always had plenty to eat, and that I enjoyed every bit of it. I still love to eat, and can eat massive amounts, but I had to learn to balance my eating with intense training."

Now a chiseled champion of athleticism, Ancheta is the antithesis of the overweight child of Filipino parents. His mother and father have left Charlotte, N.C., to spend their retirement in the Philippines. Ancheta remains in North Carolina's largest city, where he's turned his zeal for fitness into a haven for people at varied points on the fitness scale. He's the owner and founder of Edge Performance Training of Charlotte (www.myedgecharlotte.com), the 5,000-square-foot epicenter of his health-and-wellness enterprise. His roster of 40 clients includes men and women ages 25 to 52. They come to Ancheta, in part, because of what he calls "functional fitness." Such training involves building a body capable of doing real-life activities in real-life positions, not just lifting weights in an idealized posture established by a piece of gym equipment.

For Ancheta, fitness is a calling, one he owes to a familial friend who took him to a karate class when he was 11 years old. The University of Georgia graduate (he earned a B.A. in exercise science) taps into his

years of experience as a professional fighter, coach and second-degree black belt in taekwondo every time he instructs an individual client or an entire class. Most days, he's training his first client at 6 a.m., then teaching or training until 9:30. Client workouts often resume as early as 3:30, and his last class ends four hours later.

"I'm able to provide effective and fun workouts," says the 37-year-old Ancheta, who's a National Strength and Conditioning Association-certified coach.

The International Kickboxing Federation's website lists Ancheta as a Southeast U.S. Light Heavyweight Champion. Years of experience as a fighter have left him with the inevitable – and sometimes traumatic – battle scars of his former pursuit.

"I've sprained knees, torn ligaments in my knees, cracked ribs, suffered numerous cuts, but you can deal with those injuries, even if they are severe. The concussions are injuries that you never get over. I have suffered at least 10, and I think that's 10 too many. Unfortunately, I thought I was indestructible when I was younger. (That's) definitely not the case."

Like any other athlete, the good-natured Ancheta aspires to develop proficiency in new areas – not an easy feat for a man running a full-time fitness facility by himself.

"I'm still working on mountain biking. Just like anything else, I know it will take time," he says. "Unfortunately time isn't always available, and I always seem to be running out of it."



Certified fitness expert Daniel Ancheta trains a client. Photos by Jessica Milligan

On the cover: Ukulele artist Ben Ahn. Photo by Jerek Barcelona of Jerek Barcelona Vision Photography. *Unity* is a celebration of food, art and culture. Published six times per year, *Unity* is exclusively distributed to clients of Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group, both world leaders in foodservice. To contact us, send an email to marketing@thompsonhospitalityjv.com. ©2014 Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group. Produced by Final Edit, www.finaledit.net

