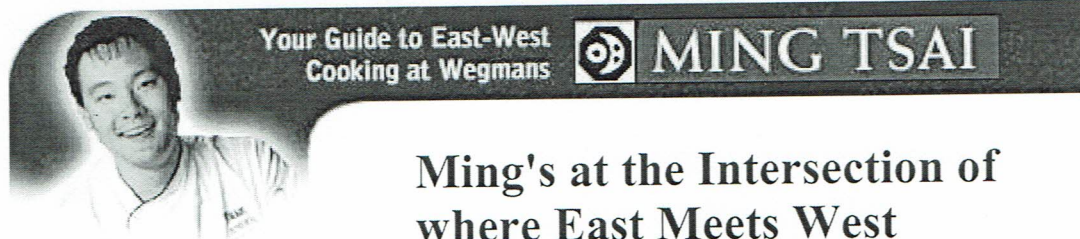


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Good Morning, andrea-tester-bilson. It's Tuesday, January 25, 2000.



## Ming's at the Intersection of where East Meets West

By Missy Carducci  
Wegmans Internet Editor

**Who:**  
Ming Tsai

**When:**  
February 7

**Where:**  
Wilson Arts Center Theatre at  
Harley School • 1981 Clover  
Street, Rochester

**Time:**  
Performance starts at 7 p.m.;  
Wine Talk starts at 6:30 p.m.

**Tickets:**  
Available through That's T.H.E.  
Ticket in Wegmans Video  
Department or call 1-888-the-  
tix (843-8497)

**Special Appearance:**  
Pittsford Wegmans • 3195  
Monroe Avenue, Rochester

**Time:**  
10-11:30 a.m. Limited seating.  
Pick up your free ticket at the  
Pittsford Service Desk

What do you get when you blend a talented chef raised cooking in his family's Chinese restaurant with a talented chef who studied at Paris' bastion of haute cuisine, Cordon Bleu? You get Ming Tsai, the country's foremost practitioner of East-West fusion cooking who scrupulously respects the foods of both cultures as well as their culinary traditions. As the second of four celebrity chefs to appear at Wegmans in conjunction with the [Taste of the Nation Cookbook Author Series](#), Ming brings his unique interpretation of fusion cooking for you to admire and emulate on February 7th.

### The Real Ming Dynasty

Himself a fusion of diverse talents and accomplishments, Ming combines a highly disciplined intelligence with an insatiable curiosity as he practices what amounts to culinary gene splicing. Unlike most other "fusion" chefs, Ming learned the ways of the East long before he traveled to France to wield a whisk whipping up classical concoctions. His undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering (from Yale, no less) conceivably gives him an edge as he designs dishes that perfectly balance ingredients and techniques to create East-West masterpieces. And, knowing precisely what he's doing in the kitchen helps — something Ming refined while earning a Master's Degree in Hotel Management from Cornell and cooking in great hotels and restaurants worldwide. Mostly, though, an out-and-out love of food fuels Ming's inventiveness and drives him to pass along

his passion to you. That's why Wegmans wanted to make sure you got a chance to see him in person at the store. We think you'll find Ming's energy and enthusiasm inspiring, so much so that you're likely to be introducing East to West in your own kitchen sometime soon.

## When Worlds Collide Deliciously

In the introduction to his recently released first cookbook, [Blue Ginger: East Meet West Cooking with Ming Tsai](#), Ming explains his modus operandi. In each dish, he looks for a "superior way to celebrate" bold flavors and preparation techniques recognized in Eastern and Western cuisine to produce something that's "not just new but better." Take one of his trademark dishes, Foie Gras and Morel Shu Mai with Caramelized Sauternes-Shallot Broth and Truffled Edamame Puree [pg. 177]. It's done with a simple Asian preparation, i.e. traditional shu mai [open-topped dumplings], of luxurious Western ingredients to transform the components into "elegant fare." Ming's informed, imaginative approach easily explains the runaway success of his award-winning restaurant Blue Ginger in Wellesley, MA, nominated as Best New Restaurant in the Country in 1999 by the James Beard Foundation.



## Ming Shares his Thoughts

Though Ming didn't exactly invent fusing the cuisines of the East with those of the West, he's certainly taking the concept to new heights. Cookbook author Ken Hom identified the emergence of "East-West Cuisine" back in 1980, and acknowledges that Ming is "ideally suited to assist in the amalgamation of these different culinary traditions." As Ming shares some of his thoughts, I think you'll see why that's so true.



- [East-West Appreciation](#)
- [A Good Dish for Starters](#)
- [You Are Where You Eat](#)
- [Ming's Interpretation of Maki Sushi](#)
- [Breaking the Mold](#)
- [Family Values](#)
- [Don't Be Afraid to Learn Something New](#)
- [Ming's Pantry Essentials](#)

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## East-West Appreciation

**Wegmans:** If your challenging Foie Gras and Morel Shu Mai recipe "epitomizes" East-West cuisine as you state in the book, do you think it's a prerequisite to have a working knowledge of the tenets of Eastern and Western culinary traditions to be successful preparing it and others?

**Ming:** All you need to have is an appreciation of good food. You do not have to have a knowledge like myself or like my sous chefs have on Eastern techniques and ingredients. Fois gras does not appeal to everyone, but in my opinion it is an incredible food. In this fashion, it's a great introduction, especially since some people are afraid to eat it in a terrine or seared. Because the recipe is steamed it doesn't jump up at you like a big piece of liver on the plate.

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### A Good Dish for Starters

**Wegmans:** Your simpler Classic Roast Chicken with Sticky Rice Stuffing [pg. 130] perfectly illustrates how your broad base of food knowledge helps make cooking fun and creative. Would you consider this recipe a good one for beginners?

**Ming:** I think that's a great starter recipe, so to speak. A lot of my recipes I do for my show and the book are classic recipes reinvented. Everyone has probably roasted a chicken before. It's my version of a roasted chicken, and by using the sticky rice, it's obviously more Asian. But it is very, very approachable and very easily done.

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### You Are Where You Eat

**Wegmans:** Your East/West approach with the roast chicken seems to veer to the Southwest a bit, judging by the use of jalapeno or serano chilies, as do your Asian Gazpacho with Cilantro-Jicama Cream [pg. 20] and your Chipotle Sweet Potato Soup with Bell Pepper-Bacon Salsa [pg. 22]. Are these dishes an indication of a trend in a new direction or do they simply represent an intriguing point on your fusion compass?

**Ming:** Actually, like most chefs, you're influenced by the region you live in, and I spent two years in Sante Fe. I came across a lot of jalapenos and other southwestern ingredients like chipotle, which is a smoked jalapeno, and masa, which is basically polenta [cornmeal mush], just a different grain.

There are a lot of chefs, approximately 10,000 in New York City alone, and they've all been influenced by where they live. For example, Jean Georges Vongrighen [of Jean Georges, NYC] spent some time in Thailand and he opened up this restaurant, a couple of them, called Vongs. Very, very Thai influenced. Even if he wants to admit it or not, he's actually an East-West chef—a fusion chef. Even Ken Oringer, who has Clio's [in Boston] which is 'contemporary new American cuisine,' has a lot of Asian influence in his food. He doesn't call it that. He calls himself a 'new French' or a 'new American' chef. All of us do it. You should be influenced by where you live and the products available. I use Wellfleet oysters now, but when I lived in San Francisco, all my oysters came from Point Reyes. Both are very, very good. All the great chefs in France use Asian, Middle Eastern, and many other kinds of spices. You can tell when you use something that you like you're going to continue using it when you move out of the area.

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### **Ming's Interpretation of Maki Sushi**

**Wegmans:** You've chosen Prosciutto and Asian Pear "Maki" [pg. 55] to demonstrate to those attending your appearance at our Pittsford store. By your own admission in the book, you're "pushing the envelope with this recipe—there's no fish, rice, or even nori (thin sheets of seaweed used for wrapping sushi) used." What's the idea behind it?

**Ming:** It's true East-West cuisine because I'm using a combination of Eastern and Western techniques. Every dish I make has both Eastern and Western ingredients and Eastern and Western techniques, particularly this one. It has the Eastern technique of rolling sushi and a very Western ingredient, prosciutto, and of course, an Eastern ingredient, Asian Pears.

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### **Breaking the Mold**

**Wegmans:** Your friend Ken Hom seems to feel that resistance to East-West cooking from traditionalists is breaking down. Do you get a lot of flak from Asian purists or do they admire your chutzpah, if I can be allowed to mix my ethnic terminology?

**Ming:** For the most part, I think I have more people supporting what I'm doing than those who think I'm

ruining a great food or something. I'm sure there are some French chefs who say 'I can't believe what he's doing with fois gras.' At least my customers say the food is really good [Editor's note: Blue Ginger serves 200-300 dinners every night]. There's a lot of food out there that people are mixing (it's called 'con-fusion'); it's really a hodgepodge of flavors and textures that doesn't work. Then you should get flak. You do need to understand and appreciate fully how to do this style of food first before you start blending it. Incidentally, what's most amazing to me is how many Asian Societies there are in the country; their representative have all called. I'm completely flattered. Apparently what they're telling me is that I've kind of broken the mold of a typical Asian American, for various reasons. I'm honored that they consider me a spokesperson and I'm happy to do it.

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### Family Values

**Wegmans:** While watching your cooking show featuring your Vegetarian Stir-fry Grilled Pizza, I was struck by how much your family life has apparently influenced your penchant for mixing culinary styles and tweaking traditions across the board. You credited your Grandma Lau Lau for her role in the creation of that recipe. What's the story behind that one?

**Ming:** Back in the early 70s, Lau Lau was putting hoisin chicken on pizza. My brother and I said 'What the heck are you doing Grandma? We want tomato and pepperoni.' We, of course, wanted to blend in. She was way ahead of her time though, because Wolfgang Puck, probably 5-10 years later said, 'Hey, let's put hoisin chicken on pizza.' That show was in honor of her.

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### Don't Be Afraid to Learn Something New

**Wegmans:** I noticed that your other Grandmother (Nai Nai) inspired the reinvention of her "zongzi" as your Sticky Rice Pouches with Garlic Flashed Scallops [pg. 64]. Since most of us didn't grow up with such talented culinary role models, should we practice tricky techniques like hot oil flashing [to sear the fresh scallops and add great taste]?

**Ming:** Practice makes perfect, obviously. But, even if you do the recipe only 80% well, it's still going to be pretty darn good. Don't be scared. You're never

going to learn unless you try.

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### Ming's Pantry Essentials

**Wegmans:** If someone's just getting started with East-West cooking, what's the one pantry item or related group of items that you'd insist on getting and using? Would it be galangal, otherwise known as blue ginger?

**Ming:** That's a tough question. You need fresh ginger for sure. For the dry pantry, you need soy sauce, fermented black beans, oyster sauce, rice vinegar, and sambal oelek [the most popular of the hot chili pepper pastes used as condiments in China and Southeast Asia]. That's a good start. If you want more East-West pantry ideas, go to [ming.com](http://ming.com).

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### Taste of the Nation-Rochester

Taste of the Nation-Rochester is an all volunteer organization that is dedicated to relieving hunger in the Rochester Metropolitan Area. The Famous Cookbook Authors Series, a project of TOTN-R, is now in its third year and benefits Wilson Commencement Park. The series has presented cooking demonstrations by world-class Author-Chefs, including Steven Raichlen, Rick Bayless, Stephen Pyles, Mario Batali, and Martin Yan. The 2000 Series features Rozanne Gold, Ming Tsai, Nick Malgieri, and David Rosengarten. Each presentation will be preceded by an optional Wine Appreciation Talk. A sampling of wine and the author's recipe will conclude the evening. With community support from corporations such as Wegmans, Barnes & Noble, American Airlines, and Citibank, the series organizers offer an informative and entertaining evening that satisfies the stomach and the soul.



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