



Celebrating Food, Art & Culture

Southern hospitality in San Francisco

Digital paintings in 3-D

Asian philanthropist Martha Choe

Japanese and vegan a perfect fit

Sushi king Philip Maung

Yiyun Li's write of passage



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Taste for success



Hissho Sushi offers turnkey sushi bars for more than 400 national locations.

In 1989, Philip Maung arrived in the United States from what was then Burma. He had \$13 in his pocket – and a dream.

In true rags-to-riches fashion, Maung has ended up as CEO of Hissho Sushi, a nationwide food-service/distribution company that manages and operates more than 400 sushi bars. The recipient of numerous awards, including the 2009 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award for the Southeast, Maung is quick to deflect praise. He speaks in thoughtful, halting English as he searches for the right words to describe how he got to where he is today.

"I don't even know how I'm here today but it's a credit to our people, not me," he says, referring to his 500-plus employees. "Our people deserve all the credit. Each and every day, they inspire me."

He also attributes his success to following his passion, claiming that he never considers what he does to be a "job."

That passion took root in Charlotte, N.C., in 1996. Maung moved to the banking town after spending a few years in Los Angeles and then Orlando, Fla., with the hopes of starting his sushi chain. He was encouraged

by Charlotte's weather, culture and hospitality, and he naively thought it'd be a cinch to get a loan.

"But nobody wants to talk to you unless you already have some kind of story," he says with a laugh. He borrowed money from friends and ran up credit card debt in an effort to get started.

The other stumbling block was the fact that he didn't know the sushi business. He began reading about the subject and talking to successful business owners. He also fell back on the experiences he learned from his parents, veterans of the restaurant business.

Maung and his team overcame those initial challenges. Today, Hissho Sushi offers a turnkey sushi bar program, partnering with upscale supermarkets, grab-and-go sushi bars and other retail establishments, as well as cafes, hospitals and universities. Hissho is the Japanese word for certain victory, and from the time they launched the company in 1998, Maung and company have found victory, so to speak, by offering a healthy product. Hissho Sushi focuses on natural ingredients, including natural wasabi and ginger, and avoids artificial colors and chemicals. There are vegetarian and vegan offerings, all of which allow end customers to feel good about their food choices.

Meanwhile, at the company's 46,000-square-

foot headquarters, employees also maintain a healthy outlook, thanks to the newly updated office gym and fitness classes available to them.

"We think that making the culture right and making everybody happy, then money will follow," Maung says.

Maung also speaks enthusiastically about the company's values, which range from "Inspire and Be Inspired" to "Achieve the Impossible" to "Generate Fun." Fun comes in the form of the office karaoke machine and frequent employee events, such as movie night. He stresses that these 11 core values are more than just a list posted in the lobby or shared on orientation day, never to be seen again.

"We think it's worth every penny, spending it on the employees and increasing employee benefits," he says.

"We try to make it an environment where people like to come."

While Maung has a dream to dominate the market one day, he indicates that he is not so much chasing money as chasing dreams and happiness.

"We are more than a seller of the sushi products," he says. "We want to give people a much better work environment."

Finally, he stresses that people should feel motivated every morning by what they do. "If not," he says, "find something else."



Philip Maung



Write of passage

Writer Yiyun Li arrived at the University of Iowa from China in 1996, planning to earn a doctorate in immunology. Born in 1972 in Beijing and with a bachelor's degree from Peking University, she says she dreamed of becoming a Chinese Madame Curie.

Since 2000, however, Li has taught writing at the University of California, Davis, and has served as a contributing editor to the literary magazine, *A Public Space*. She has settled in this country, married an IT professional and become the mother of two children. In the last decade, she has been chosen by *Granta* as one of the 21 best young American novelists under 35, and by *The New York Times* as a top writer under age 40. When the MacArthur Foundation named Li as a 2010 fellow, awarding her a "genius" grant of \$500,000 payable over five years, Li celebrated because the award would give her even more time to write.

This seemingly sudden turn of events began for Li soon after she arrived at Iowa. Within months, Li realized she was studying science at a university renowned for its creative writing programs. A reader all her life, she had not discovered Western literature until her teens. By 1990, however, when she served her required year in the Chinese military, she liked James Joyce enough to carry a copy of "Dubliners" with her.

It might not be so surprising, then, that just a year after Li's arrival at Iowa, she took her first writing class. That class eventually led her to a master's in creative nonfiction from the Nonfiction Writing Program

at the University of Iowa and a master's in fiction from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Li was no longer a scientist, but the author of stories that appeared in such magazines as *The New Yorker* and *The Paris Review*.

In 2005 Li's stories were published in her first collection, "Ten Thousand Years of Good Prayers," winner of the Frank O'Connor international short story award and PEN/Hemingway award.

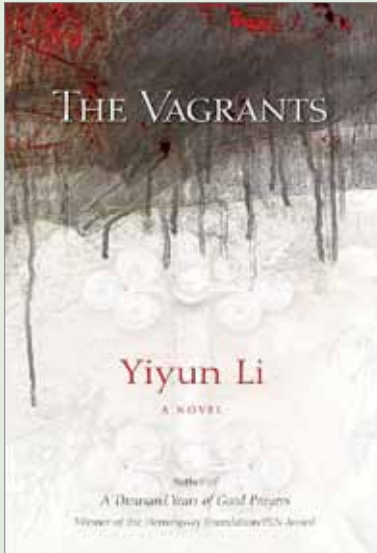
Today Li seems to have boundless energy for her new career – frequently working on more than one piece of fiction at the same time. She has said writing a novel is like running a marathon, and by writing a short story, she can take a break. In fact, her most recent volume of short stories, "Gold Boy, Emerald Girl," was written almost entirely while Li completed her novel, "The Vagrants."

Many of Li's protagonists are people whose circumstances and personalities have made them emotionally isolated, yet these people seem almost heroically resigned to remaining alone. In Li's stories, all set in China, her protagonists frequently appear sad and lonely as they survive daily life in a culture that has discouraged them from forming satisfying long-term relationships. Li's quiet, understated style conveys a contradictory sense that, although her characters appear to be unhappy, they can simultaneously be stoically content.

In talking about her style and strong characterization, Li has recognized the influence of other writers. Some of her fiction, she says, was written as if to "answer" the work of authors she admires: Tolstoy, Chekov, Dickens and, especially, William Trevor, a contemporary novelist she calls her favorite author.

Unwilling to make overtly political statements, Li says her social and political views are incorporated in her fiction. And although all her previous stories have been set in China, her newest stories include some that take place in her new homeland.

For avid readers, that's good news indeed. It means we will be seeing far more of Li's work, including her reflections on life in America as well as in China.



"The Vagrants" was the Book of the Month at Amazon during February 2009.



Yiyun Li

Eastern expression

Asian Pacific American Heritage month premieres the contributions made in and for the United States by members of Asian descent. Influence of Asian food, culture and tradition continues to provide a positive influence to the melting pot of our society.

The three artists chosen for this *Unity* publication have different styles, yet the commonality of Asian influence in his or her work is apparent. All three artists express their faith in people to live their passion. They believe there is good in the world and their artistry will continue to contribute to that good.



"Gate of Heaven and Earth" by Hannah Ueno



"Spring Rain" by Hannah Ueno

Hannah Ueno

Born in the U.S. and raised in Tokyo, Hannah Ueno received an MFA in Visual Communications from Washington State University and a BFA in visual communications from Nihon University in Tokyo. Her work has appeared in various group exhibitions, and corporate and private collections.

Ueno's digital paintings in 3-D provide stunning visual images through the use of lenticular lens — a process that produces images with an illusion of depth and the ability to change or move when the image is viewed from different angles. The chosen cover piece, "Seven Wishes," illuminates streaks of evening clouds and a sunset backdrop. The darkened gray walkway gives the viewer prominent access with the illusion that one can walk directly into the pitch forest using

dim lamps to light the path. The held flowers show different perspectives from the eyes of both beholders. The lone girl adorned in spring attire and flip-flops sitting on grass laden with snow are antonymous with its name, "Spring Rain." The shower of white, spring flowers are stark against the blue-black sky and the brown limbs before her and barren wood behind her that exemplify a cold loneliness. The pathway in Ueno's "Gate of Heaven and Earth" seems to lead to earthly, majestic mountains and heavenly blue skies. The braided, green grass flourishes while the trees bear no leaves or fruit, yet the young women express signs of bliss and happiness through the observation of white doves that represent peace.

Ueno says her work is an interpretation of "a place of solace and healing where one can dream, reflect and hope." The visual narratives and juxtapositions of her work take the viewer to that place of solace in the mind of one's eye and represents her personal views of humanity, nature, culture and history.



Karen Young Ford

Karen Young Ford initially pursued a career in advertising, earning a BS in marketing from the Fashion Institute of Technology, but a pottery class at Parsons School of Design changed the course of her life. Ford was intrigued by the tactile element of clay that other two-dimensional art mediums did not offer her. After experimenting with many different techniques, Ford settled on ceramics as her medium of choice.

Growing up a second-generation Chinese American, Ford has always had an interest in her Asian heritage. She states by studying historical Asian ceramics, porcelain in particular, she learned its function plays a strong role in culture, community and ritual. Ford's piece, "Oxblood Red Sushi Set," is made from porcelain. She used an actual caladium leaf as the template. The cocoa-bean template and surrounding deep red exude warmth and invite food to the template's surface. The Oxblood or "Sang de Boeuf" glaze is a traditional Chinese glaze fused with small pieces of recycled bottle glass to create different surface effects. "Bamboo Sushi Set" is also made from porcelain and a caladium leaf template. Ford's use of hints of green and blue effectively bring out the predominant color of the set. The use of its glaze was influenced by a trip to Japan. "My work celebrates the union of family and friends in a communal fashion," says Ford. "I strive to harmonize the relationship between form, function and nature. It is my goal to enhance the everyday ritual of eating, drinking and living by making it a beautiful, calm and peaceful experience. These serving pieces may be used for a variety of different foods. They can also hang on a wall or be used decoratively."

It is Ford's hope that teaching the tradition and process of ceramics will continue the trend of people wanting to make objects with their hands.



"Oxblood Red Sushi Set" by Karen Young Ford



"Bamboo Sushi Set" by Karen Young Ford

Kyudong Lee

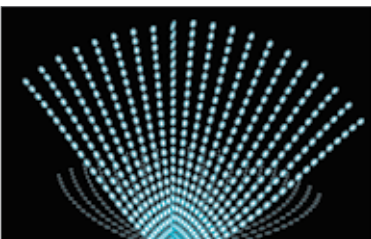
Kyudong Lee was born in East Asia. He studied and received his MFA in computer graphics and interactive media from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Lee's artwork is computer generated and includes a series he terms as "artificial life." Two pieces from that series, "Life 01" and "Life 04," are described as imaginary plants that may live on an unknown planet. "Earth may not be the only planet where life exists. We are not alone in this universe," he explains.

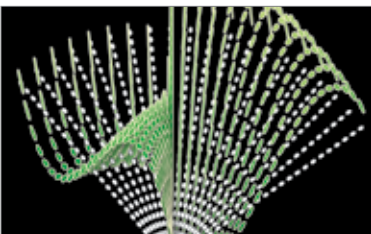
Lee states that he does not intentionally incorporate Asian culture and philosophy in his work, but because those entities of East Asia are intrinsic, they are usually represented in some way.

"Some think artists' work is useless," says Lee. "But I believe all work of artists is valuable. Many represent research and are sympathetic with the lives of ordinary people. The work of an artist always looks for the best in lives and in the world."

"... all work of artists is valuable."



"Life 01" by Kyudong Lee



"Life 04" Kyudong Lee

Efficiency expert

Though not of Japanese descent, Elizabeth Andoh has lived in Japan for more than 45 years. “I thought I was a grown-up when I got here, but I’m much more of a grown-up now,” chuckles Andoh, who was born and raised in America.



Elizabeth Andoh

“I acquired knowledge and want very much to be able to share that with people who cannot spend a lifetime learning what I have.”

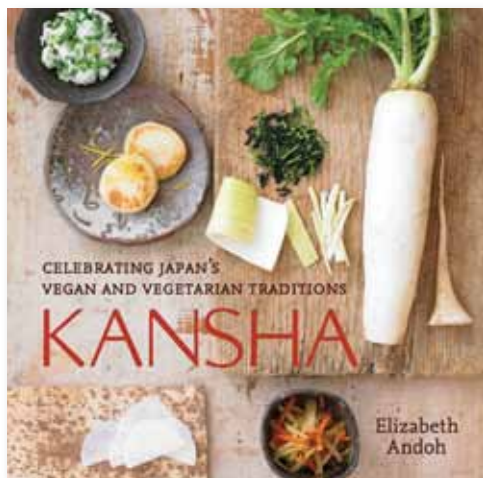
That knowledge centers on Japanese culture and cuisine. Formally trained at the Yanagihara Kinsaryu School of Traditional Japanese Cuisine in Tokyo, Andoh became a lecturer, business consultant and writer whose latest cookbook,

“Kansha: Celebrating Japan’s Vegan & Vegetarian Traditions,” introduces readers to an ancient concept not limited to cooking.

“Kansha is a word that is used in many circumstances,” she explains. “It means appreciation. In terms of food and in a culinary context, you are talking about two things simultaneously: One is an acknowledgement and an appreciation of what the natural world provides, and the other is how clever people are in accessing it and using it.”

While Andoh’s book provides examples from the Japanese kitchen, the notion of Kansha is a universal one. “You can practice it making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich,” she says.

It’s all about being practical and mindful, such as soaking ingredients overnight to prepare stock. Another aspect of Kansha is to use food fully, without waste. “A large



Ten Speed Press © 2010

part of the pantry that I focused on (in the book) are dried products, and they’ve got extended shelf life,” Andoh says. “They are just sitting there waiting for the day you don’t get to the market. Also, most of them are multitasking ingredients, so you’ve got a meal that has put itself together.”

Another example? Take a root vegetable such as the eggplant. It has three elements with different cooking qualities: the peel, leaves and root. “You don’t necessarily have to cook them all together. But a very classic Japanese philosophy is to make a meal out of one ingredient,” explains Andoh.

In addition to writing and teaching, Andoh enjoys going to the supermarket and asking people what they plan to do with the food they’ve bought. “My academic degree is as an anthropologist,” she says, “and I do think that you can find out more about people from what they eat, what they won’t eat and who they eat it with than any other human endeavor.”

Spicy Glazed Eggplant

Yield: 6 servings

From epicurious.com

- 1 1/4 pounds Asian eggplants, trimmed, halved lengthwise and cut diagonally into 1 1/2-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons mirin (Japanese sweet rice wine)
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon finely grated peeled ginger (use a microplane)
- 1/8 teaspoon Japanese seven-spice powder (sometimes labeled “shichimi togarashi”), or to taste
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped chives

Toss eggplant with 1 teaspoon salt and drain in a colander, stirring occasionally, 45 minutes.

Rinse eggplant under cold water and dry well, pressing out any excess moisture.

Stir together mirin, soy sauce, ginger and seven-spice powder.

Heat oil in a 12-inch heavy skillet over medium-high heat until it shimmers, then sauté eggplant until browned, about 8 minutes. Stir in mirin mixture and cook, gently stirring and turning frequently, until sauce becomes a glaze and eggplant is browned and tender, about 1 minute.

Serve hot or at room temperature, sprinkled with chives.





Asian cuisine and San Francisco usually conjure up vivid images of Chinatown, but this Asian eatery is all about Southern hospitality.

Good food knows no boundaries

Tony Hua, owner and founder of the Hard Knox Café in San Francisco, knows a little about the school of hard knocks – in the sense that he credits his own life experiences with his restaurant's success.

It makes sense, considering that Hua never worked in a restaurant prior to opening Hard Knox Café. And though he's a Vietnamese man who grew up in the Southwest, he manages to elevate Southern soul food to a new level.

Hua immigrated to the United States from Vietnam with his family at age 2. He began working at age 13,

comfortable setting and friendly faces to the staff, and you have a formula for success."

Hua notes that soul food and Asian food have much in common. Both utilize frying, braising, steaming, grilling and stir-frying. Both also favor marinating meats prior to cooking.

Hard Knox Café began as a simple restaurant that served soul food but, by Hua's own admission, lacked character. Over the years it has evolved into the comfortable venue where locals and tourists gather to feast on award-winning fried chicken, twice-cooked

Banana pudding

Yield: 4-6 servings

5 large egg yolks
1/2 cup sugar
1/4 cup cornstarch
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 cups milk
3 tablespoons banana essence
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 tablespoons butter

Put the egg yolks, sugar, cornstarch and salt in a bowl and stir until well mixed. In a pot, bring milk, banana essence and vanilla extract to a simmer. Add 3/4 of the milk to the bowl of egg yolk mix and temper.

Pour it back into the pot and cook while continuously stirring until the mixture has thickened. It is ready when you see it bubble. Remove from heat and stir in butter.

Let custard cool off before serving. Layer bananas on bottom of serving bowl. Add custard and another layer of bananas. Top off with Nilla wafers and enjoy.



"I view food as a medium to bring people together, whether it's for business or fun."

first in a flea market assisting vendors, then for his uncle's supermarket and finally for a wholesale case-and-carry warehouse. "My experience from those jobs gave me an understanding of consumer habits and helped me build customer relation skills," he says.

Introduced to soul food while growing up in Texas, Hua began dabbling in his home kitchen, combining what he learned with the knowledge he acquired from his various jobs and ultimately developing the concept for Hard Knox, which opened in the Dog Patch district of San Francisco in 1999.

"I view food as a medium to bring people together, whether it's for business or fun," he says. "Add a

barbecue ribs and jambalaya. The portions are generously sized and pack lots of flavor, as do the Southern sides, which include such staples as collard greens, and black-eyed peas, with plenty of cornbread on the side.

Eventually, Hua was able to open a second location in the Richmond district of San Francisco, and he hopes to expand into other communities and continue sharing his love of food and people. That second love inspires Hua on a daily basis. He praises the great people he's met, within the restaurant industry and beyond.

"People inspire me," Hua concludes. "Everyone has a story to tell, and what better place to share it than in a restaurant?"

Goodwill on a global scale



Martha Choe

The mantra of the National Association of Asian American Professionals is “We Make Leaders!” But in the case of Martha Choe, it might be more apt to say that the organization has simply recognized someone who has long been a leader.

Choe, chief administrative officer of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, was one of 10 recipients of the distinguished 2010 NAAAP 100 Awards. The association is the country’s largest and fastest-growing Asian professional association and, through the awards, pays tribute to leaders who have overcome obstacles and made significant leadership contributions. NAAAP celebrated the most recent winners at the 24th Annual NAAAP Convention and Diversity Career Fair, which took place in August 2010 in San Francisco.



A visit to a mobile computer lab. Photos: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

In her job as CAO, Choe contributes to the foundation’s goal of bringing innovations in health, development and learning to the global community. She oversees four departments that are critical to this mission: Information Technology, Human Resources, Facilities and Security. The newly created role allows Choe to reinforce her personal goal of helping people live healthy, productive lives, a seed that was no doubt planted when her parents, Korean immigrants who arrived in the States in 1948, settled the family in New York, where Choe was born.

The family began integrating into their small Asian American community, both in New York and Seattle, Wash., where they moved when Choe was 12. After graduating from the University of Washington, Choe pursued an MBA from Seattle University in order to supplement her undergraduate education in speech and ethnic studies. She began her career as a high school teacher, then quickly moved on to leadership roles in various industries including financial services, where she worked for a decade as vice president at the Bank of California Credit Administration, Commercial and Private Banking. From there, she

transitioned into public service, acting as a two-term Seattle City Council member and chairing the transportation, economic development and finance committees. In this role, she navigated such

challenges as those facing the Regional Transit Authority and the need for a multimillion-dollar civic center.

Choe was often recognized for her leadership, including by the governor, who appointed her as director of the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development. In this role, she faced a new series of daunting challenges, including the need to attract new businesses to the area and to develop trade opportunities across Asia, Mexico and Europe in an effort to promote job growth. She also led the team that won the state’s bid for assembly of a Boeing 787 plant, landing Washington the honor of seeing an international team of top aerospace companies assemble Boeing’s innovative new airliner in the city of Everett – and beating out 47 other states in the process.

In 2004, Choe joined the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as director of the Global Libraries initiative, part of the foundation’s Global Development program, which aims to increase opportunities for people in developing countries to overcome hunger and poverty, a fitting endeavor for a woman who is active in philanthropic and community organizations. Specifically, Choe has served on the boards of Asian American organizations and as former chair of the White House Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islanders.

Now part of the ranks of esteemed NAAAP award winners, including such past winners as Elaine L. Chao, former secretary of the Labor Department, and artist/architect Maya Lin, Choe reflects the association’s mission of building leaders, and she continues to work tirelessly for the good of her community and the world at large.