



GOURMET POTLUCK

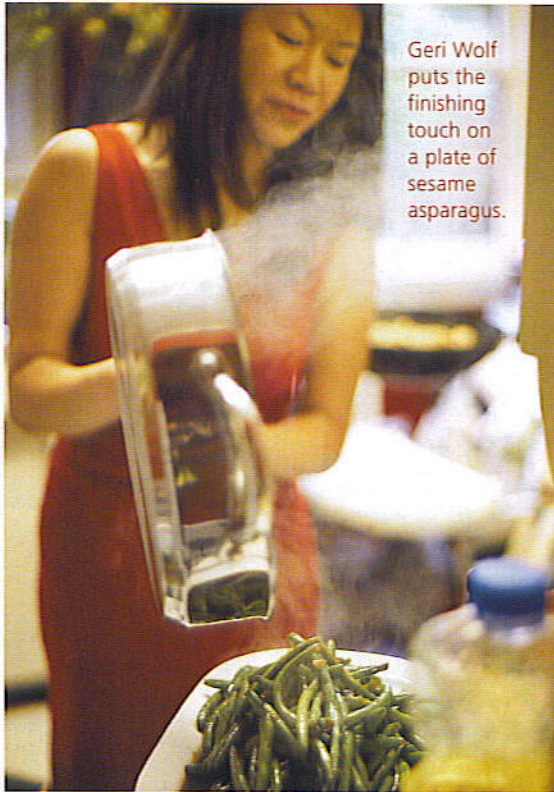
by *Jeremy Iggers*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JILL GREER

IT WAS DUMB LUCK THAT FIRST BROUGHT Amy and Jonathan Asbury's gourmet dining club together, but it's potluck that keeps them going. The four couples all live in different towns and neighborhoods, and have different careers, but they had this much in common when they met: They were all recently married, and they had all used Geri Wolf as their wedding planner.

A couple of years ago, Wolf invited about twenty of her clients to a potluck dinner party, and the four young couples hit it off. "At the end of it," Amy Asbury recalls, "there was a group of us that really liked each other. So I sent out an email saying we'll have another potluck with that same group, and we'll host it the next time."

Amy and Jonathan Asbury, with their daughter Ayla, are hosts for the Asian-fusion potluck.

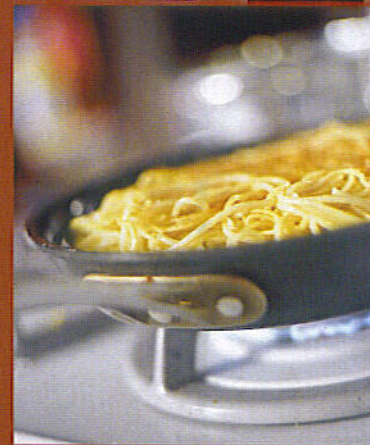
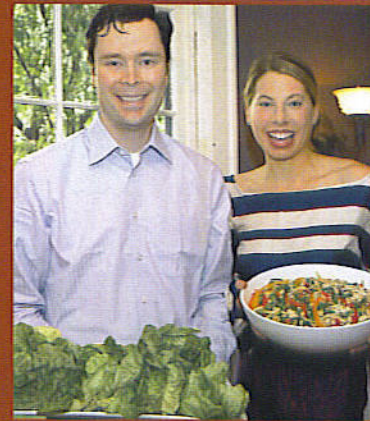


Gerri Wolf puts the finishing touch on a plate of sesame asparagus.

This month, it's the Asburys' turn again, and at 6:30 on a Saturday evening, the kitchen in their south Minneapolis home is bustling. The Asburys' choice for the theme of the evening — Asian fusion — was a natural one: Amy and Jonathan have traveled extensively in Thailand, and developed a love for Thai cuisine. Their contributions to the menu are a starter of hot and sour tom yum soup, and coconut rice with mango and pineapple for dessert.

Amy literally has her hands full with baby Ayla, so Jonathan's sister, Heather Asbury, is keeping an eye on the big pot of soup, and putting the finishing touches on the dessert. Helping out with the party is a moonlighting gig for Heather, a graduate of the prestigious Culinary Institute of America; by day, she manages Lucia's Bakery & Take Home in Uptown.

Meanwhile, Gerri Wolf is decorating the tabletop with butterfly chopstick holders, and a Zen-inspired arrangement of bamboo and smooth stones; a colorful paper parasol hangs from the light fixture overhead. For tonight's dinner she has prepared sesame asparagus, and homemade bok choy kimchi, a spicy Korean dish. And Jonathan Asbury is busy setting up the bar with Japanese and Chinese beers, some sake, a bottle of red Bordeaux, and Okunomatsu shochu, a more potent cousin of sake.





WANT TO START YOUR OWN POTLUCK DINNER CLUB?

Here are some pointers from event planner Geri Wolf of Style Laboratory.

PLAN AHEAD:

"Have people report what they are bringing before the event so that you don't end up with ten of the same thing."

CHOOSE YOUR MEMBERS CAREFULLY:

"We have a really special dynamic in this group. Everyone is really into food, and we just have fun hanging out together."

DON'T LET THE GROUP GET TOO BIG:

"No more than twelve, because it's challenging to have a group conversation when the group is too large, and more difficult to prepare food for larger groups. An ideal number is eight to ten."

This page, clockwise from left: Jonathan Asbury, Chris Thierfelder, Amy Asbury, Brian Olson, Geri Wolf and Michelle Olson.

Opposite page, top left: Brian and Michelle Olson with the fixings for Chinese chicken lettuce wraps; lower left: Chris Thierfelder stir fries bok choy with chicken.

Chris Thierfelder is solo this evening — his wife, Sara Buckwitz, is out of town, as are one of the founding couples, Geri Katz and Bryan Elliott. Chris's contribution, stir-fried spicy chicken with bok choy over fried noodle cake, is best served hot from the wok, so he's busy in the kitchen with some final chopping and frying, while everyone waits for the last couple, Michelle and Brian Olson, to arrive.

When the Olsons arrive, bearing all the fixings for Chinese chicken lettuce wraps, the dinner can begin. The eating, and drinking and talking and storytelling goes on late into the night, and when the dishes are cleared, the evening ends with a Guitar Hero tournament. Michelle won the tournament, and \$70,000 in Monopoly money, while runner-up Chris took home a big gold chain, worthy of a rock star. ♦

