

EAST CALHOUN NEWS



Serving the ECCO and CARAG Neighborhoods since 1973

June 2004

THE STYLE LABORATORY: LET'S HAVE A PARTY!

By Kay Kirscht

Two Silverstone skillets sit on two separate, portable ranges. The heat's turned on – the room temperature shoots up 10 degrees...it's not just flame hitting metal; there's heavy competition going on. On May 18 – in a special, in-store event – The Style Laboratory challenged two professional chefs, Juan Garcia (personal chef and caterer) and Chris Thierfelder (amateur chef) to prepare a meal a la *Iron Chef* (a cable TV cooking show where each chef has a limited time and range of ingredients with which to work). A portion of the proceeds from the evening went to the American Cancer Society, for the fight against breast cancer.

The evening's fare – 75% of the challenge – lay neatly displayed along the counter: shrimp,

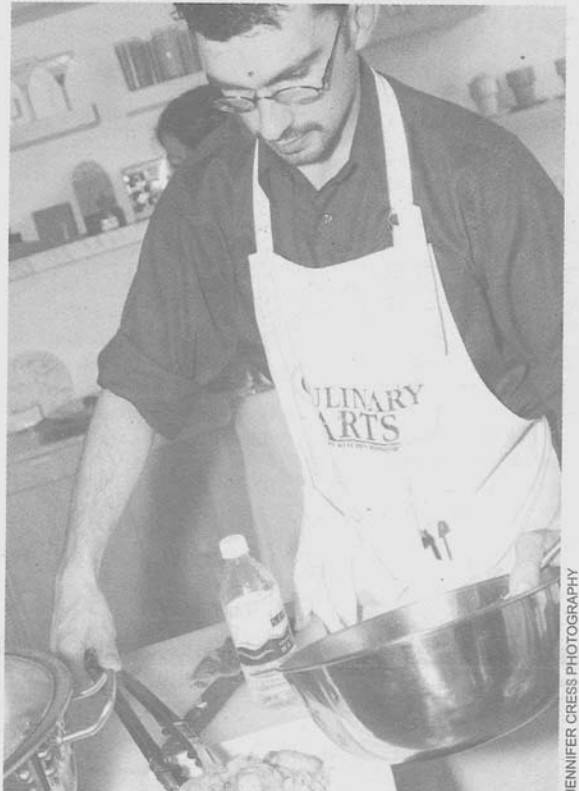
Napa cabbage, lettuce, grapefruit juice, olive oil, coconut milk, ginger, garlic, white wine vinegar, tamarind slices and cellophane noodles. Three judges of local culinary repute (Curt Carter, owner of Jazzmines; Benjamin McCallum, executive chef of Three Sons Kitchen; and Beth Jones, editor of *Minnesota Palate*) wait to taste the results and to declare a winner. The *Star-Tribune* mentioned the event in their food section the week before...and the heat was truly on – the store filled front to back with foodies, intent on seeing the next big thing in culinary magic.

Chris dove into production, barely giving himself time to peruse the ingredients. Meanwhile, Juan spent his first five minutes *frowning* his way

through the bizarre food selection, trying to concentrate (by the way – while these men are cooking, there's this Irish fellow wandering around with a mike, John Cosgrove (host of Pub Quiz), providing the *color report*. Does the Irish guy know cooking? No. He complains someone neglected to provide *potatoes*...it's kind of like he wandered in from a nearby soccer game. Needless to say, John is great fun, but he's not helping much! Juan finally grabs some cabbage, quickly cuts it up, and throws it in the skillet. The crowd gasps. I look around me at the horrified faces of food fans. My, this *is* fun!

A hostess walks by with a big plate of spring rolls from the restaurant, Azia. I dare not go

STYLE LABORATORY page 4



JENNIFER CRESS PHOTOGRAPHY

Chris creating a salad of Napa cabbage, grapefruit, and vinegar and oil dressing.

STYLE LABORATORY from page 1

after the spicy sauce that normally accompanies this rice-paper-wrapped delight (I'm wielding a camera in one hand; a mini-cassette recorder in the other). Juggling the recorder into the other hand, I bite into the roll-up and taste shrimp, cellophane noodles and oh-so-fresh cilantro. Sauce would only have covered up the wonderful taste. I quietly vow to pay more attention to spring rolls from now on...they were never meant to be a *delivery system* for peanut sauce.

Meanwhile, Chris appears to have his meal strategy. Noodles hit boiling water, shrimp's in the pan...but, no sesame oil! He's forced to scrap his meal and start over with remaining ingredients and time.

The clock ticks down the last three minutes. John Cosgrove comes dangerously close to wearing a skillet-and-rice-noodle hat. Geri Wolf, owner of The Style Laboratory – and the person who thought up this event – walks through the crowd working her own hostess magic. The Style Laboratory (tagline: *"Invite, Entertain, Indulge"*) is about fine design, entertaining, thoughtful gifts, and gracious living. It's part retail store; its shelves are filled with fun, original, and colorful giftware, glassware, cards, party favors, and doo-dads – but The Style Laboratory's main focus lines the shelves *under* the merchandise – catalog after catalog of hospitality vendors: caterers, photographers, designers, chefs, dressmakers, equipment rental. Geri has carefully constructed a one-stop event planning resource center...a *company* that happens to be disguised as

a shop – "You can come in and buy invitations, you can have your event planned, you can do research on hospitality vendors...all in one location!"

Can we expect more in-store events in the future? Wild competitions? Live demonstrations? Geri nods – "It's a good way for our customers to meet chefs and hospitality vendors, these events give potential clients access to food (and other) professionals that they would not normally have in day-to-day life." (For example: how many *personal chefs* do you know?) "We do a lot of event planning."

As far as merchandise for the casual shopper, I overheard one lady chuckling that The Style Laboratory has everything... even *divorce cards*. "We get such a different mix of people in this area," says Geri, "We opened in November (business, by the way, has been great); we had our Grand Opening event, and that drew about 120 people. We're having events every six to eight weeks, and we're going to start doing them more often." (For more information on upcoming events, go to www.stylelaboratory.com and join their massive, 3000-strong e-mail list). "For April Fool's Spring Fling, we had one of our chefs do a demonstration on spring appetizers...and we had a Karaoke machine! We try to do something different with each event, so it's not the same thing every time."

The Cook-Off has ended: each chef miraculously produced a marvelous dish – pro photographers moved in with large-format cameras to take big color pictures of the food; the judges

eagerly move in with forks. I neglected to note who won (*some reporting, huh?*)...It was simply marvelous to see two people so taken with the act of creating; whose lives revolve around cooking.

Once I get home, I face my own culinary challenge – every one of my recipes begins: "Defrost Freezer. Cook whatever emerges from the glacier first." I carefully decant a glassful of my favorite, aged-in-vinyl box wine – and reach for the eggs and frying pan...

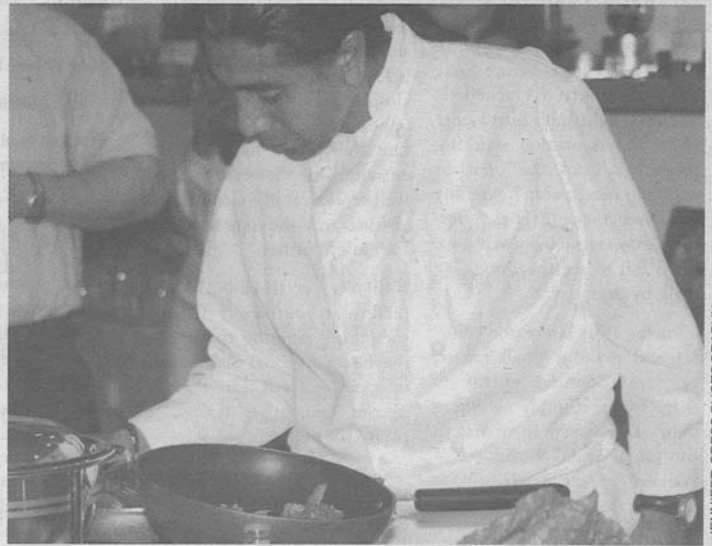
The Style Laboratory is located at 915 West Lake Street. 825-4705

Kay Kirscht reports on business for East Calhoun News. ■■



John Cosgrove, doing the color commentary

JENNIFER CRESS PHOTOGRAPHY



Chef Juan Garcia creating a cellophane noodle entree with grapefruit juice, with shrimp and pickled ginger as garnishment.

JENNIFER CRESS PHOTOGRAPHY