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Food

The Ithaca JOURNAL

Cultures are well-blended in Filipino food

By EDNA MICHAEL
Special to the Journal

FOOD FROM the Philippines is an international affair.

"To understand our cuisine, (one must understand) the country's geographical and cultural history," says Nina Christian, an Ithaca resident transplanted from the Philippines. "We draw our origins from varied cultures."

Christian holds a bachelor's degree in food and nutrition from the University of Santa Tomas (one of Asia's oldest Catholic Universities, where her grandfather was a professor of dentistry and her grandmother was dean of the college of nursing) in Manila she owned and managed a restaurant and a boutique.

Bringing a love and knowledge of her native cuisine with her, Christian came to the United States from the Philippines in 1982. Her late husband, Vance Christian, former Villa Basil professor of wine

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education and hotel management at Cornell University, was the magnet that drew her here.

"I met Vance in 1976 while working as director of CHART (Center for Food and Restaurant Training)," says Christian. "He had been coming to Manila for many years to give seminars on food, beverage and wine. . . . He was born in the West Indies and loved Filipino food. One of his favorites was pork and chicken Adobo," she says.

"He would stop in Manila for an early lunch and get his fill of Adobo and Calamansi juice (our native citrus fruit, the nearest equivalent of lemon and limes) and then catch a plane for Bangkok. He personally would fill the (air) containers to fill two cartons for the seminar," says Christian. "That was for one day, so you can imagine how many kilos of calamansi we had to get if his seminar lasted two weeks."

Adobo, which is thought of as the national dish, is actually Mexican in origin, says Christian, but much of its popularity was derived by a need to preserve pork (that's what most Filipinos mean when they say meat, she says) without refrigeration.

"Adobo is cooked in vinegar, salt, garlic and pepper and other spices. It keeps well for days and has therefore become a staple," she says.

The international flavor of this dish is typical.

Philippine national cuisine is a fine cousin to Indonesian and Malay cuisines, says Christian, just as the 7,000 islands are a northward extension of Malaysia and Indonesia. The country also owes much of its culinary tradition to Spain and China, she adds, while the United



Nina Christian of 1034 Hanawalt Rd. displays two of her Filipino dishes: Adobo and fresh lumpia (hearts of palm).

States has also had an influence with its popular foods — hamburgers, hot dogs, ice cream and Coca Cola.

"Filipino food was prepared by the Malay settlers, ignited by commercial relations with the Chinese traders (and) moved in 300 years to Spanish rule," says Christian.

"Our multi-racial features are that of a Chinese-Malaya face, a Spanish nose and an American smile, with small grains that turn starchy and are gently sweetish when properly boiled."

All Filipinos eat rice, says Christian. "It is the main bulk of the meal. There is a thank you among us that the main dish may be simple and plain, but the rice has to be

very, very good. The best, ground rice is cooked when newly harvested, with small grains that turn starchy and are gently sweetish when properly boiled."

Food and manners are strongly linked. "A Filipino host feels he must stuff his visitor until they can hardly breathe — otherwise, he has not been a good host," she says.

"There should be more than enough food prepared so that after the meal there is a lot of food left over on the table. In families of good eaters, breakfast has hardly been started when the cook is called in to discuss what is to be done for lunch and dinner. The same dish is not repeated twice or three times."

There are several other restaurants in New York with the new machinery, including Pierce's 1994 Restaurant in Elmira.

Turback's restaurant of Ithaca uses a machine called Grand Cru, manufactured in Syracuse, that is similar to the Croviniet machine but is much less expensive.

"We got one because we kind of favor New York state anyway, and when we found that someone was making one in the state we bought it from them," restaurant owner Michael Turback said.

"We've had the machine for close to a year. We use it everyday," he said. "We've

for six different wines by the glass. The thing that's nice about the nitrogen system is that it allows you to have several different wines and if you don't sell them quickly, or if it takes a few days to sell them, there's no problem — the wines just go good as it was when you opened the bottle."

Turback said he is able to offer a variety of things that people would not normally be able to have by the glass.

Comparing the Grand Cru to the Croviniet, Turback said, "It's like the difference between buying a Cadillac and buying a Rolls Royce."

The Rolls Royce has more grill work, and a finer tuned engine — similarly, the Croviniet machine has "lots of chrome, and maybe some of the fixtures are a little more expensive," he said.

"Also, you do pay something for the name Rolls Royce, and I think you pay something for the name Croviniet as well."

Nina Christian's recipes

Pork and chicken adobo

- 1 (2 lb.) chicken, cut into serving pieces
- 1 lb. pork, cut into serving pieces
- 1/2 cup native vinegar
- 1 head garlic, crushed
- 1/2 tsp. crushed peppercorns salt to taste
- 1/2 cup water
- oil or lard for frying
- 2 tbsp. soy sauce

Place chicken and pork in a sautépan. Season with vinegar, crushed garlic, peppercorns and salt. Boil for about 30 minutes then add water. Simmer until tender. Remove the garlic from sautépan and fry in lard in a frying pan. When garlic is brown, add pork and chicken and fry until all are lightly browned. Add soy sauce and the stock to the meat, and let simmer for about 5 minutes. Serves 6.

In remote areas where there is still no electricity, the slaughtering of a pig or a cow is an event. Friends are called beforehand which pair of the animal they wish to buy. Only when each section has been sold will the cow or pig be slaughtered. To keep a lot of meat preserved without ice, it is cooked in a variety of ways, as in this recipe:

Lumpia ng ubod

- 1/2 cup pork fat
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 cup soy sauce
- 1 lb. boiled pork, sliced
- 1/2 lb. shrimp, dried
- 1/2 cup raw ham
- 1/2 cup shrimp (to make: poached shrimp heads, add water, and maintain at a boil for 10 minutes. Strain off the shells.)

- 3 tbsp. soy sauce
- 1 cup green beans, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup cabbage, shredded
- 1/2 medium ubod, boiled in salted water until tender and cut into julienne strips
- salt to taste
- 24 lettuce leaves
- 24 lumpia wrappers (available at Oriental food stores)

In a pan, place the pork fat and sauté the garlic and onion. Add the pork, shrimp and ham. When cooked, put the shrimp juice and soy sauce. Add green beans, cabbage and ubod. Cook until tender. Season with salt.

Place lettuce leaf on the end protruding over the edge. Wrap about two lumpia tablespoons of the mixture in the lumpia wrapper, tucking in one end, with the lettuce leaf peeping out of the other. Serve with sauce.

- Sauce:
- 4 tbsp. sugar
- 1/2 cup soy sauce
- 1 cup beef or chicken stock
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 tbsp. cornstarch dissolved in 1/2 cup water
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- Combine sugar, soy sauce, stock and salt. Bring to a boil. Add cornstarch solution. Stir until thick. Cook over low fire for one minute. Serve sauce with finely minced garlic if so desired. Serves 12.

The Filipino likes cockfights. When one rooster loses, it is called "lumpina" and goes into a pot. A special recipe is needed to make it tender. A lumpina is tougher than a coop-bred chicken but tastes better. After all, being a spirited fighting cock, it was fed especially well and managed by its handler, wear every night day, its only fault was losing the fight.

Mechado

- 2 lbs. beef stew
- 1 strip of pork fat to be used as "mechero" or "wick"
- 1 tbsp. soy sauce
- 1 tsp. vinegar
- 1 tsp. pepper
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 2 big onions, chopped
- 7 bay leaf
- 1 1/2 oz. can tomato sauce
- 2 medium sweet potatoes, chopped
- 1 cup water

Make a lengthwise cut on beef. Insert fat strip. Marinate in soy sauce, vinegar, pepper, salt, onion and tomatoes for two hours. In a deep pan, fry meat until brown. Remove from the marinade liquid in the pan. Add pork and oil to pan. Put the meat in a shallow pan. Add the bay leaf, onion. Add the meat, tender and sauce is thick. Simmer about three hours to exhibit the "wick."

Now you can order good wine a glass at a time

From Staff and Wine Reports
One of the added pleasures of eating out is that each person can order the kind of food they like.

When it comes to ordering wine, however, that variety of choice can make a host's job a little more difficult, if his friends have ordered different things.

A flit of safe, a rare sirloin steak, a Chicken Kiev, a mild foie gras? This is too much. But three bottles of wine for three people is . . . well, just not done, besides being extremely expensive.

To the latest rescue comes the Croviniet machine, and its imitations, which enable you to have many different wines — inexpensively.

Open a wine bottle in a second to the machine, the Croviniet pump nitrogen in the bottle to replace the wine poured into glasses. Nitrogen is an inert gas that does not affect the wine. This French invention was intro-

duced in the United States in 1981. It allows a good bottle of wine to be opened and stay good for a longer time by keeping oxygen from reaching the unopened wine.

Many wines benefit by being allowed to "breathe" oxygen for a relatively short time before being served. No wine lasts long, however, once it is exposed to the air.

A growing number of good restaurants are investing in this machinery, and that means you can order a greater number of wines by the glass. Not just the house wine, but vintage wines from the U.S. and abroad.

One organization that is especially happy with the Croviniet is the International Wine Center of New York. This organization's members are interested in learning more about the wines of the world and about good food.

The Center has two restaurants in New York: Tasting, on West 51st Street, and Tasting 2, on Second Avenue. These were

among the first U.S. restaurants to use Croviniet.

Tasting's Croviniet machines can hold from 14 to 22 different wines, each at the proper temperature. Wine can also only be ordered by the glass, but by the half glass, for serious tastings aimed at educating their patrons.

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