

FOOD & HOME

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HINTS FROM HELOISE

A shell of a problem

Dear Heloise: I often purchase the frozen pie shells to bake pies, and I have difficulty removing slices from the pan after they are baked; the pie crust is always stuck. Do you have any suggestions for how to make this easy without breaking up the slices? — **Carole Owings, Wildwood, Fla.**

Carol, that's just a plain ... well ... pain! Here are some hints to consider. Switch brands to see if a different one does not stick — it may be that simple. It may be the type of pie you are baking. If you pre-bake the pie crust, poke holes in it, bake, then add the filling.

However, if you are baking a pie with filling (pecan, pumpkin or my fave ... blue- or blackberry!), do not poke the shell with a fork. Doing so will let sticky liquid seep through and will cause the crust to stick. Do let the pie (and crust) cool before cutting.

Last resort? Remove the frozen crust, grease the pan, put the crust back in and proceed. — **Heloise**

Cocktail sauce

Dear Heloise: Every year around the holidays, I buy a bottle of cocktail sauce. I use only a small amount. It sits in the refrigerator for several months, then I toss it out. Is there any other use for it? I checked the label, and it only lists shrimp. Should I just buy more shrimp? — **Dan in McDonald, Ohio**

Dan, don't toss the sauce or buy more shrimp! This sauce is basically "spicy ketchup," so get adventurous! Put it on burgers, hot dogs and fries. It works with crab, too.

It makes a zingy "dip" when poured over cream cheese. I run a fork through the slab of soft cream cheese to score it, then pour on the sauce. Set out with crackers, and tada ... quick-and-easy eating. — **Heloise**

Coffee-filter conundrum

Dear Heloise: I purchased a 12-cup coffee maker. It's the same model as my previous one. The paper coffee filters almost always collapse, and grounds end up in the coffee. Any help would be appreciated. — **Bonnie, via email**

I have tasted coffee grounds in fresh-brewed coffee! Yes, the same filters (do be sure they are the "old" filters) should work. However, I bought some "same brand, same size" filters on the Internet, and they did this too. You can wet the filter to make it stick — this should help. Or try a permanent filter that you wash out. — **Heloise**

Hardened honey

Dear Heloise: I buy honey at a big-box store. After a while, it crystallizes, and I would heat it in a pot of water to thin it out.

I solved my problem by putting it into small jars. If it starts to crystallize, I put it on the top rack of the dishwasher. When the cycle is finished, the honey is back to the way it was before. It works perfectly. Just be sure the lid is on tight. — **Shirley L. in Florida**

Shirley, this is a honey



John Bechtel/Special to MDN

The sushi bar, where fresh sushi is made to order, is one of the most popular spots at N.D. Asia.

The Asian invasion: N.D. Asia restaurant

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When we think about revolution, it is usually in the context of violent overthrow of one ruling class in favor of another. However the most important revolution in human history was actually a series of quiet changes in different places and different times driven by food. Prehistoric man was nomadic. When he was hungry, he went out and hunted and then ate. He ate well and he didn't have to worry about food storage. There was no such thing as agriculture or long-term cultivation of crops, no worries about protecting his fields from flooding, storms, blight or raids from other hungry nomadic groups. So what prompted early man to start farming? The short answer is food production had to keep up with expanding population.

As they learned how to domesticate certain plants (think wheat and rice) and animals (think dogs and oxen), their food production increased. Their small bands settled in one place and began to build villages. In those areas fortunate enough to be blessed with staple crops, villages grew into cities. Even today, big cities are nothing more than dozens or even hundreds of communities that grew around each other. The content of their diet was dictated by reliability of food supply, the soil, climate and length of the growing season. Those areas that lacked the appropriate plants and domesticated animals were often isolated from other areas and for thousands of years were sparsely populated. Sound vaguely familiar, North Dakotans?

The areas that grew quickly developed social structures that evolved into government, taxes, sedentary lifestyles and the need to live in much closer proximity to each other. The ancient Latin word for those who lived in cities was "civis," which is related to our modern words civility and civilization,



John Bechtel/Special to MDN

One of the entertaining ways to eat is by venturing to a hibachi table, where the food is prepared fresh in front of you.

both of which have to do with the ability to organize society and get along with each other. Food is the reason we have cities, civilization and even mass migrations. Being civilized emphasizes appropriate behavior between hosts (restaurant staff) and guests (restaurant customers). The revolution and evolution of agriculture explains a lot about the history of North Dakota and the content of our local restaurant menus. It even explains why the subject of this article is appropriately named "N.D. Asia" restaurant rather than, say, "N.D. Chinese."

N.D. Asia is located at 3400 16th St. SW, at the front of the Cash Wise Grocery plaza. Its phone number (for carry-out) is 852-1240. It is handicapped accessible. Reservations are not required. It is open from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Lunch specials (which save you money) end at 3 p.m. Group dining is available. Call and ask for Vanessa to make arrangements. The worst thing I can say about N.D. Asia is that you almost need

GPS to find your way in and out of the parking lot. Now, with that out of the way, let's look at the menu. This restaurant serves Chinese, Japanese, Thai and Indonesian food. Understanding the differences can help you navigate an Asian menu with improved satisfaction

Chinese cuisine

China is a big country, and there is no one cuisine that can be accurately and comprehensively labeled as "Chinese." Many very distinctive cuisines are to be found in China. Because of this, there is considerable variety in Chinese food. China has a long coastline, which means they have access to many species of seafood. Cultivated rice appeared early in China but it did not grow reliably in all parts; the other regions are known for their noodles instead. With a large population and many gods, the Chinese weren't big on eating rituals. They pretty much ate anything, gener-

ally in large quantities, and served family style. They use more oil, garlic and more meat in their cooking which is likely either grilled or steamed. Up until recently, there were logistical problems transporting food from one part of the country to other parts safely, so different cuisines remained distinctive to certain regions. Of the five taste centers, salty, sweet, bitter, sour and spicy, sweet spicy and sour spicy tend to predominate in Chinese food. The sauces tend to be fragrant, with more ginger, garlic and peppercorns. Fermented bean pastes are strongly flavored.

Japanese cuisine

About 2,200 years ago, rice in Japan was reserved for the elite wealthy or powerful. The poor ate grains. When rice production improved, it became a staple of Japanese cuisine. A culture steeped in Buddhism, eating meat was frowned upon, and rituals of eating were important.

Just think of the difference between how we prepare for an ordinary family supper and the rituals we observe when expecting company for dinner, when we get out our linen napkins and tablecloth, best tableware and china (no pun intended) and perhaps even light candles at the table.

Japan had a scarcity of land, with the islands are surrounded by cold, deep water. The Japanese use many more uncooked ingredients than the Chinese, and they use sauces of more subtlety, including fish stock, soy sauce (that tastes different from the kind we are familiar with), miso (fermented rice), MSG (more about that in a minute) and salt. Japanese cuisine endeavors to coax the natural flavors of plants into their food and may prove more delicate and elusive to the tongue. They use less oil. There is a visual emphasis, and the Japanese believe a meal should be experienced with all five senses, a philosophy I share. Portions

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Asia

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are smaller, but there is greater separation of menu items rather than cooking a whole bunch of ingredients together as is common to the Chinese. Japanese restaurants usually plate items separately, but at home Japanese moms do what moms do everywhere: They dispense with ceremony and cook and serve family style.

There is an ineffable and

distinct difference to Japanese cuisine that finally got a name about 100 years ago. In addition to the five usual taste buds, they added a sixth one called umami. It is described as a different kind of saltiness, with a brothy, meaty and enduring taste, what we would call in wine-speak (oenology) a lingering finish, a mouth-watering and coating sensation over the tongue. Umami is all about intensity of experience. Think about this when you try the sushi or sashimi dishes at N.D. Asia.

Sushi is a special rice roll enhanced with rice vinegar and containing raw fish inside. You can eat your sushi with your fingers. Fun, fun. The rice is sticky, so feel free to ask your server for a finger bowl of rice vinegar and an extra napkin to clean your fingers. Sashimi is sliced, raw fish and you are expected to use chopsticks. The shaved ginger is a palate cleanser between bites. If you wish, you can dip the fish centers of your sushi into a small bowl of soy sauce. If you do, just dip the fish; the rice will fall apart on you if you dip it. Try to eat your rice with chopsticks, one grain at a time!

The green paste on your plate is called wasabi (made from horseradish powder) and can be mixed with your soy sauce. It is also highly effective at cleaning out your sinuses. Proceed with caution.



John Bechtel/Special to MDN

At N.D. Asia Restaurant, the staff is always prepared to make birthday parties fun.

Thai food is all about subtlety and fragrance. Jasmine (scented) rice is a staple of Thai diet. The com-

bination of mint leaves, lime leaves, garlic, ginger, lemongrass, curry, galangal, chili and basil all contribute to the unique flavor and character of Thai food. The Pad Thai Noodles dish on the menu (the name derives from phat thai) is commonly sold by street vendors in Thailand, much like hot dogs are sold here, and is a sweet and sour sauce, chili peppers, lime and cilantro.

like to travel to a foreign country. Be courteous, always polite; even ask someone how to say please or thank you in Chinese. Those are perhaps the two expressions you need to be able to say wherever you go in the world. That, and where's the bathroom?

There's magic in the staff

If there were such a thing as umami that could be applied to restaurant staff, N.D. Asia has it. It's an indefinable, ineffable something that leaves you with a good feeling. This is more than appreciating their job and wanting to keep it; this is more than knowing how important customer service is to the success of the restaurant. These people are totally into this, heart and soul, in a way that one rarely sees. And no wonder.

With the exception of the newest bus boy and the sales manager (or the Whatever-the-Situation-Demands Manager) Vanessa and her husband, Tom, the entire crew moved here to Minot from Texas last summer, where they all used to work together. And all of them, except for the latest hire, actually live together in three local residences. The dedication is obvious, from the shy co-owner Suharmin Mak, who speaks four languages, and his super polite Hispanic wife Melissa (who met her Indonesian husband when she was a hostess at a Texas Chinese restaurant), to the chefs, the hibachi showmen, the other principal, Harry, and his wife Heather, and all dining room and bar staff, everyone shows an intense desire to make your visit the best it can possibly be. Make the effort to get to know them and you will have an umami experience for sure.

The restaurant is open seven days a week. What do any of them do on the rare occasions when they have time off? The answer I got was, in the following order: Sleep, chores and skiing at Bottineau. Where did they learn to ski? At Bottineau, of course.

More about this column

For those of you who have been writing in with your comments, thank you. I respond to every email. I wish to clarify that I am not a restaurant critic, and I don't rate restaurants nor do I pretend to be an arbiter of taste for our town of Minot. Everyone has preferences. I do not tell anyone what to order or where they should eat. I look for the good where I visit, I expect the good, and I usually get the good. Running a good restaurant is very hard work. None of them are perfect, but then we aren't either. Who wants to be condemned because they are having a bad day? A disappointing experience is not synonymous with being a bad restaurant. When this happens to me, I give a restaurant a breathing spell before returning. But I do return. If it happens two or three consecutive times, it might be indicative of poor management.

This column is about enhancing the dining-out experience by providing information about food, customs and culture. This col-

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