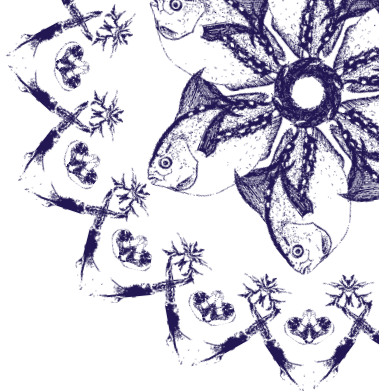
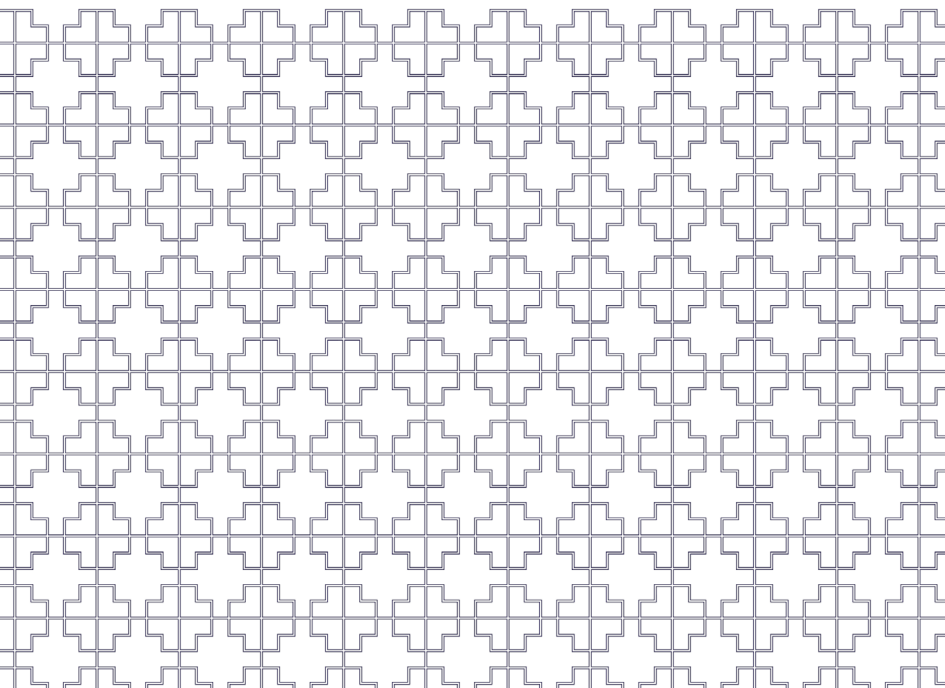




uncle anthony's
hokkien recipes



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uncle anthony's hokkien recipes

Soul Food



“Cooking, as many have said, is more an art than a science.”

My uncle adjusts as he cooks, adapting to the evolution of the dish.



ALL HAPPY FAMILIES are alike, so the saying goes. What Tolstoy did not account for was the unique and intricate repertoire of dishes that made the Loo family very happy, growing up in mid-20th century Singapore. The second eldest among five siblings, my uncle Anthony Loo took the lead in the kitchen, picking up tips and tricks from his ever-cooking grandparents and parents, and taking pains to recreate meals enjoyed outside back at home. His love for cooking trailed him into adulthood, when he set up a hawker stall in Bedok. Unfortunately, an accident prevented him from continuing with such a physically demanding job, and he has since left the industry.

That does not mean my uncle has left the kitchen. Each Chinese New Year, everyone in the family invariably looks forward to gathering at his house for the reunion dinner. We are treated to a delicious array of Hokkien classics: savoury and umami-rich pork leg jelly, braised pork knuckle in dark soy sauce, peppery pig stomach soup and steamed fish with fermented soya bean. The dishes are accompanied by bowls of steaming fragrant white rice and a huge dose of familial goodwill. Dessert is usually a bowl of cheng tng (dried longan soup) or red bean soup, after which everyone sits back in a state of high satisfaction.

Since I was a little girl, I have been amazed by the seeming nonchalance and ease with which my uncle single-handedly prepares these feasts. That, to me, is the sign of a great cook—a quiet modesty lacking in today’s world of celebrity chefs and rock star egos. I guess his attitude stems both from a genuine love of preparing food for those he loves, and a tradition of cooking daily that stretches back to his grandparents’ upbringing in Xiamen in Fujian, China.

They moved to Singapore in the 1920s to start up a trading business. My uncle’s grandmother—his greatest influence

and teacher—used to whip up dishes for her large, extended family every night. She would cook simple yet hearty dishes that carried a taste of home, such as ginger chicken, soups, stir-fried vegetables and fried omelettes. As the business expanded over the years, my uncle's father (my grandfather) had to spend time working in Malaysia. Half the family would be there helping out; the other half remaining in Singapore. So when the whole family got together, it was a big deal, cause for celebration. Intoxicating aromas would waft from the open doorway of their zinc-roofed terrace in Lorong Gambir, attracting curious, appreciative neighbours. My great-grandparents and grandparents would pull out all the stops, preparing steaming pots of bak kut teh, fried tang hoon, steamed pomfret, popiah, and more. Other occasions called for specific dishes: steamed chicken and fried noodles for death anniversaries; chu bee png (glutinous rice) for one-month-old babies.

My uncle is essentially a self-taught cook. He had no formal training. Pottering around the kitchen around his elders, he absorbed the essentials of Hokkien cuisine as readily as a piece of tau pok soaks up its stew. Common Hokkien techniques such as braising, stewing, steaming and boiling became second nature to him. Whenever he had a moment, he'd experiment in the kitchen, doggedly trying to recreate dishes eaten at popular Hokkien restaurants. My mother—his younger sister—who loves cooking as much as him, was never far behind. (In fact, she has contributed invaluable tips and edits to the recipes here.) What resulted was a repertoire at once representative of the Fujianese diaspora in Singapore, as well as the idiosyncrasies of one proudly gluttonous family.

Many of the recipes in this book are true Hokkien classics—bak kut teh, popiah, glutinous rice dumplings and



braised pork buns. But there are also recipes that bear the unique stamp of the Loo family, such as Grandma's steamed chicken in soya sauce and fried yellow noodles.

The idea of cooking from a recipe would have shocked my grandparents and great-grandparents. To them, it was a daily necessity, as natural and thoughtless as breathing. Though these recipes specify discrete measurements, I urge you to cook with freedom and autonomy. My uncle adds a dash of this, a pinch of that. He adjusts as he cooks, adapting to the evolution of the dish. Cooking, as many have said, is more an art than a science, and I concur. Feel free to treat the measurements and instructions in this book more as suggestions—I'm sure my uncle would be just as happy if you came up with your unique version of Grandma's steamed chicken. Finally, these dishes should be enjoyed around a large table with family and friends. Each recipe can serve two to four people; depending on how many other dishes it is served with.

My uncle is a reticent man; asking him to share stories about his life and work is never an easy task. Instead, I'll allow his heirloom recipes do the talking: they are an indelible part of him, his family, and his heritage. I hope that this little cookbook will act as a time capsule of sorts, preserving authentic Hokkien cuisine—and the simple joys of eating and talking around the table—for generations to come.

Samantha Lee

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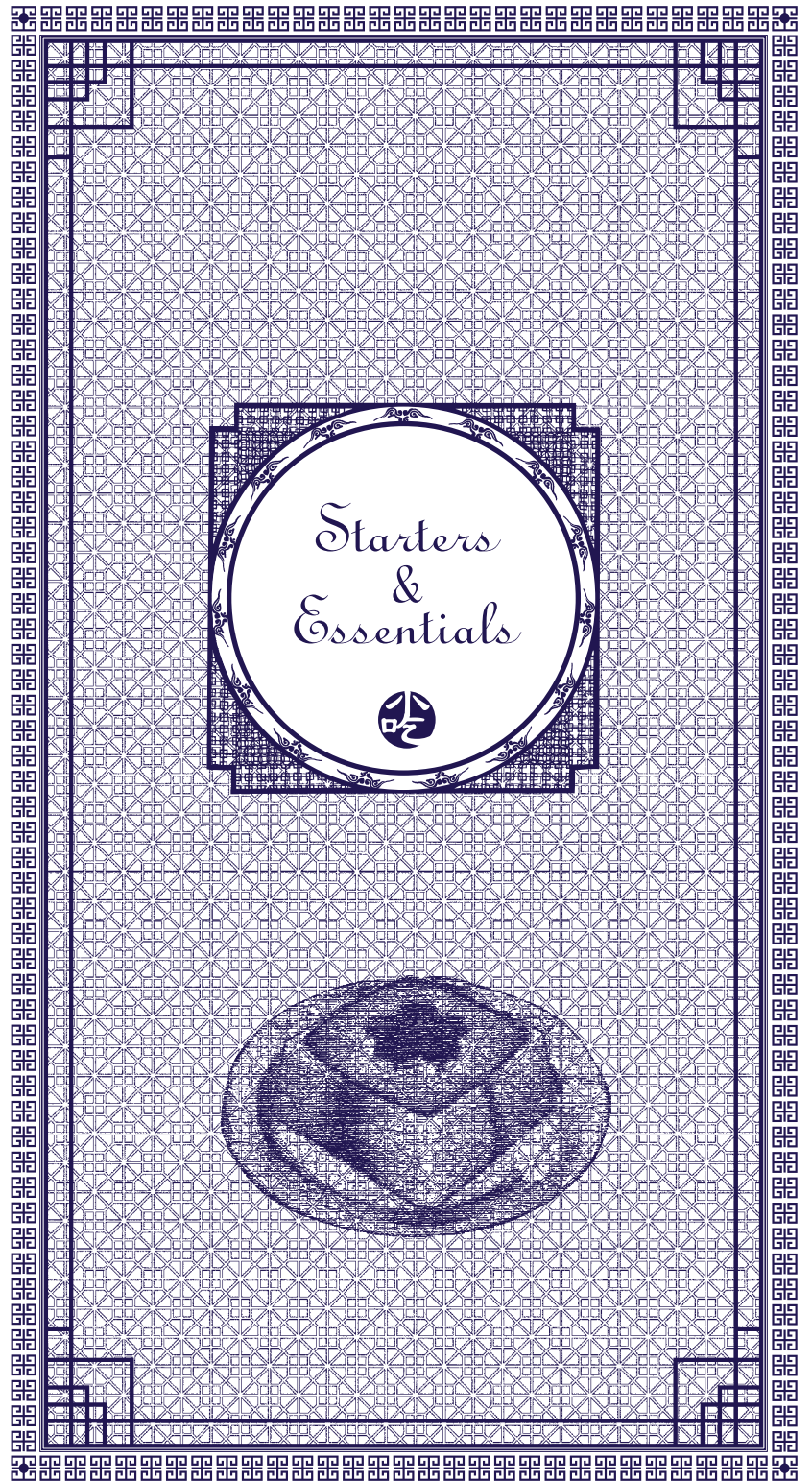
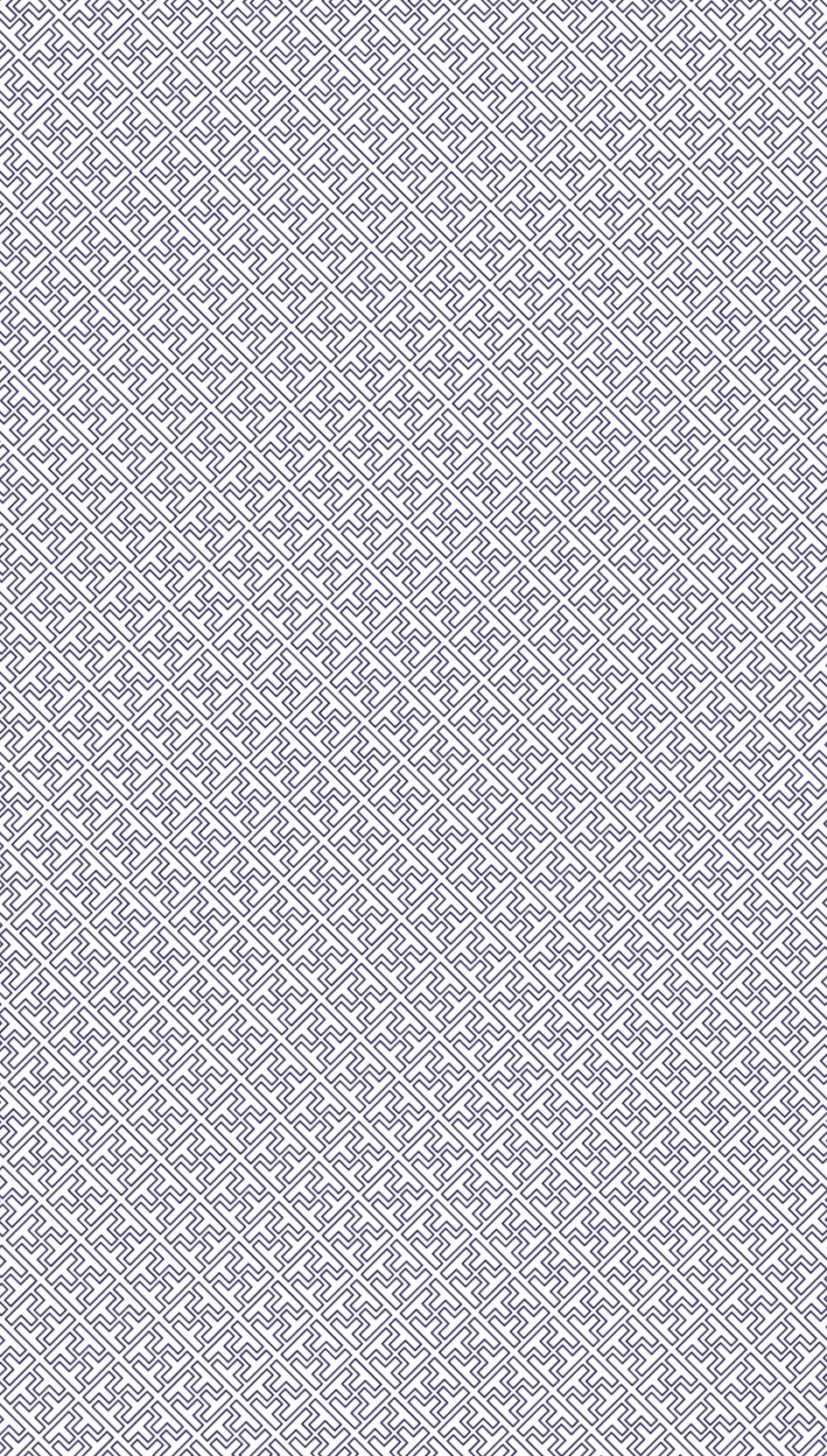
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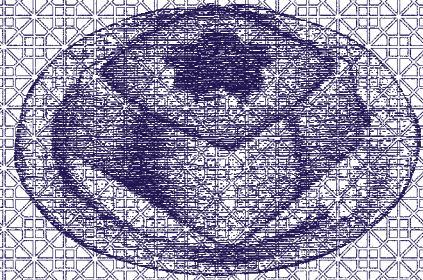
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Starters
&
Essentials



P₂/Starters & Essentials

BASIC CHICKEN STOCK

- 1.5 ℓ water
- 5 whole chicken carcasses
- 3 heads garlic
- 50 g ikan bilis (dried anchovies)

Bring all the ingredients to boil in a large pot. Reduce heat and simmer for 1 hour. Strain and discard all the solids. Store the stock in the fridge.

Tip

The stock may be frozen and stored for up to a month.

If you are strapped for time, you may purchase ready-made chicken stock from the supermarket. Note that those are saltier than the recipe here, so be prudent when adding salt to taste.

P₃/

BASIC PORK STOCK



- 1.5 ℓ water
- 1 kg pork bones
- 3 heads garlic
- 10 g tung chye (preserved cabbage)

Boil all the ingredients in a large pot for 30 minutes. Strain and discard the solids. Store the stock in the fridge.

DRIED SHRIMP WITH CHILLI SAMBAL

HEI BEE HIAM

- 200 g hei bee (dried shrimps), soaked
- 30 g belacan (shrimp paste)
- 4 red chillies
- 6 dried chillies, soaked
- 4 cloves garlic
- 4 shallots
- 4 tbsp oil or lard
- 1 tsp salt
- 1½ tbsp sugar

Pound all the ingredients, except the oil, salt and sugar, using a mortar and pestle. Alternatively, blend them in a blender. Heat up the oil in a wok over medium heat and fry the paste, stirring continuously, until fragrant. Add in the salt and sugar, stir for 5 minutes more, and serve.



Tip

Use pork lard oil for a more fragrant product. To make lard, fry a slab of pork lard over low heat until it renders.

This will keep in the fridge for 2 weeks. Have with anything—rice, noodles, meat, vegetables, even spread over bread.

COLD TOFU

- oil, for frying
- 5 small shallots, thinly sliced
- 1½ tbsp dark soya sauce
- ½ tbsp oyster sauce
- 1 block silken tofu (300 g), chilled
- 1 stalk spring onion, chopped

Heat oil in a wok or frying pan, making sure there is enough to submerge the shallots. When hot, fry the shallots until brown and crispy. Remove the shallots with their oil from the heat, then mix in the dark soya sauce and oyster sauce.

Pour the mixture over the chilled tofu. Sprinkle with the spring onion and serve.

P6/Starters & Essentials
PORK LEG JELLY
TER KAR TANG

- 1 whole front pork leg (about 1 kg)
- 400 g pig skin
- 10 pieces chicken feet
- 2 heads garlic
- 3 slices galangal (blue ginger)
- 1½ ℓ chicken stock (pg.2), or 1½ ℓ water mixed with 1 cube chicken bouillon
- 1 tbsp agar powder (optional)
- 1 cucumber, thinly sliced
- 2 stalks coriander, chopped

Seasoning:

- 1 tsp five-spice powder
- 1 tbsp light soya sauce
- 1 tbsp oyster sauce
- 1 tsp salt

Chilli sauce:

- 3 slices galangal (blue ginger), pounded and squeezed into pulp, juice discarded
- 3 tbsp chilli paste
- white rice vinegar
- light soya sauce

Bring a pot of water to boil, then blanch the pork leg for 5 minutes. Set aside. Do the same for the pig skin and chicken feet, separately.

Place the blanched pork leg, pig skin, chicken feet, garlic and galangal into the pot with the chicken stock. Cook over high heat for 30 minutes, then add in all the seasoning ingredients. Let simmer over medium heat for 1 hour, until the pork leg turns soft. Remove the pork leg and set aside. Discard the pig skin and chicken feet. Scoop off the layer of oil on the surface. If you like your jelly with a firm bite, add in the agar powder. Then pour the gravy into a container or tray to set.

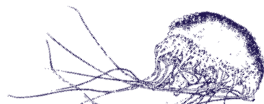
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Remove the meat from the pork leg and chop the meat up into small bite-sized pieces. Spread them evenly across the gravy in the tray. Allow to cool, then place in the fridge to chill for at least 1 hour.

To prepare the chilli sauce, mix all the ingredients together in a bowl, adding the vinegar and soya sauce to taste.

Before serving, remove the tray from the fridge. The jelly should have set and become semi-solid. Chop into small, bite-sized cubes. Place some ice cubes or crushed ice on a serving plate, then put the cucumber slices on top. Top with the jelly cubes, garnish with the coriander and serve immediately.

P8/*Starters & Essentials*
JELLYFISH SALAD



- 1 tbsp sesame seeds
- 2 stalks coriander, chopped
- 200 g dried jellyfish, soaked for 1 hour and julienned

Seasoning:

- 1 tbsp light soya sauce
- 1 tbsp black vinegar
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 1 tbsp Thai sweet chilli sauce

Heat a dry frying pan over low heat and toast the sesame seeds, constantly stirring, for 1-2 minutes, until lightly browned and fragrant.

To make the seasoning, mix all the ingredients well in a bowl.

Pour the seasoning over the jellyfish, top with the coriander and sesame seeds and serve.

P9/
PRAWN AND PORK ROLL
NGOR HIANG

- 500 g medium prawns, shelled, deveined and cut into small cubes (0.5-1cm)
- 300 g pork belly, minced
- 8 water chestnuts, peeled and diced
- ½ carrot, diced
- 1 stalk spring onion, finely chopped
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 tsp potato starch
- 2 sheets tau kee (dried bean curd skin), wiped clean with a damp cloth, cut into 15cm by 15cm pieces
- oil, for deep-frying
- sweet dark soya sauce, to serve

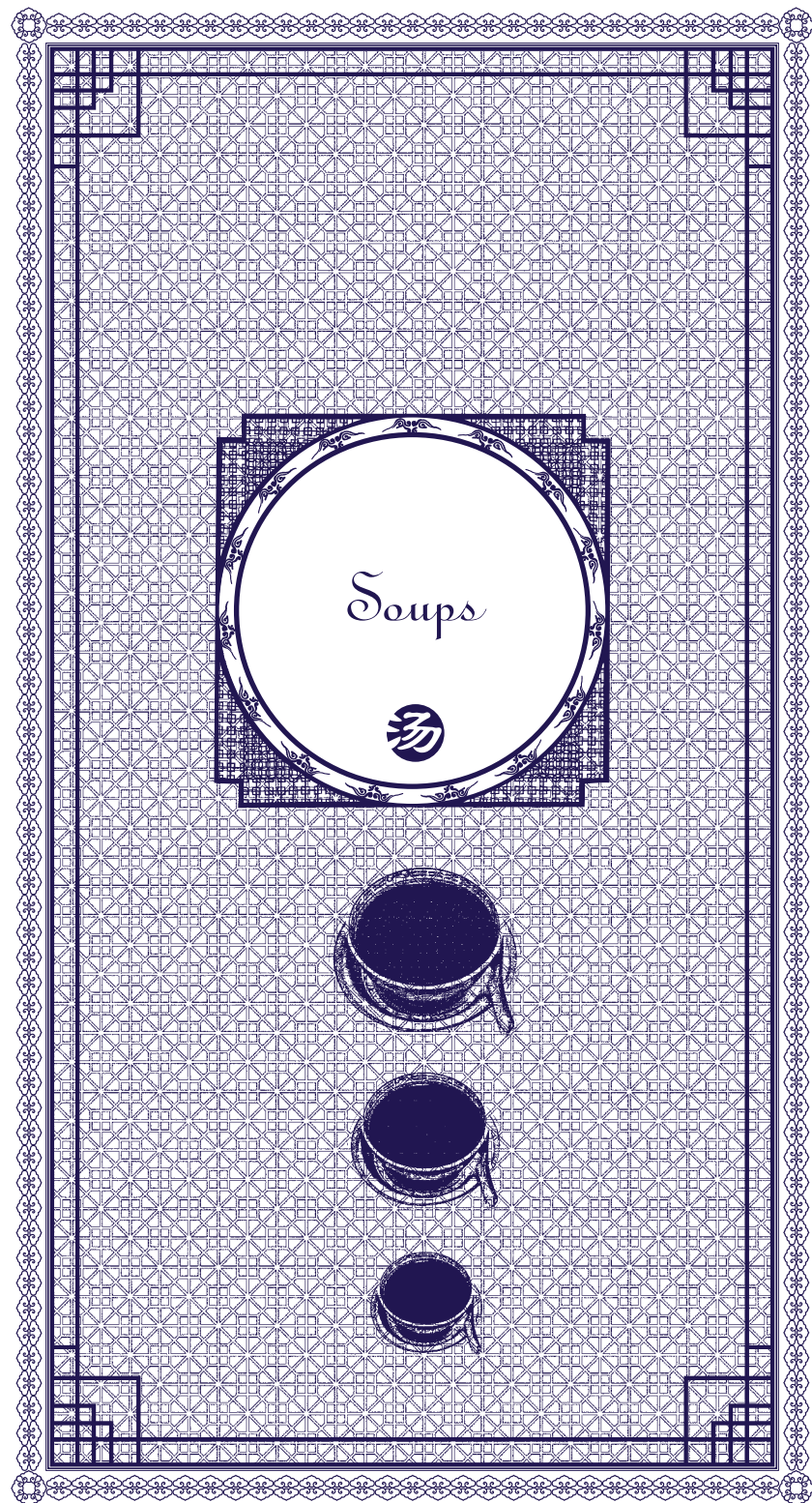
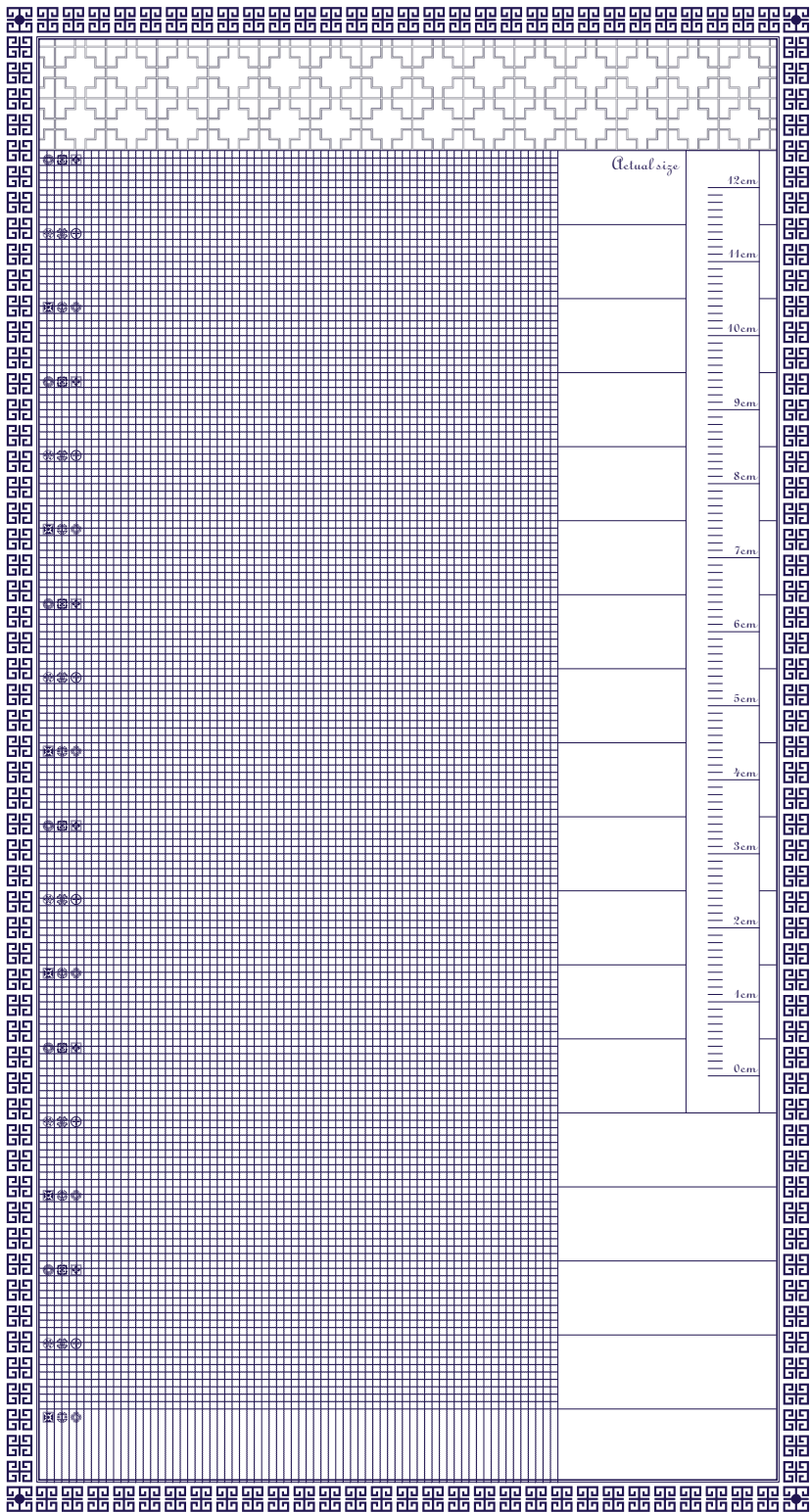
Seasoning:

- 1 tsp five-spice powder
- ½ tsp white pepper powder
- 3 tsp salt

Using your hands, mix the seasoning ingredients, prawns, minced pork, water chestnuts, carrot, spring onion and egg well in a large bowl. As you mix, sprinkle in the potato starch gradually and incorporate it in well. Cover and chill for 30 minutes in the fridge.

Lay the tau kee on a clean, flat surface. Spread 2 tablespoons of the mixture along one edge to resemble a sausage, leaving about 2cm from the edge of the skin. Dab your finger into some beaten egg and run it along the four edges of the skin. Roll the tofu skin halfway, fold in the ends, then continue rolling it to the end of the sheet. Seal the loose edge with the egg. Repeat for the rest of the tofu skins and filling.

Heat the oil in a wok over medium heat. When the oil is hot, gently place 1-2 rolls in at a time and deep-fry for 7-8 minutes, until the skin turns golden-brown. Place the roll on paper towels to soak up excess oil. Slice each roll into 3 to 4cm-thick rounds and serve with the sweet sauce.



STICKY TRADITIONAL VERMICELLI MEE SUA KOR

- 1 bundle mee sua (thin wheat vermicelli)
- 200 g pork belly (or any part you like), thinly sliced
- 1½ tbsp plus 1 tsp light soya sauce
- 1 tsp cornstarch
- 50 g prawns, shelled and deveined
- white pepper powder
- 2 tbsp oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp Thai fish sauce
- 1 tsp Chinese rice wine
- 400 ml chicken stock (pg.2), or 400 ml water mixed with ½ cube chicken bouillon
- 1 egg
- 2 stalks chye sim (Chinese flowering cabbage), chopped 5cm long
- 2 tbsp sweet potato flour mixed with 3 tbsp water
- salt
- 2 stalks spring onion, chopped 5cm long
- dash of sesame oil
- coriander, to garnish

Soak the mee sua in hot water for 5 minutes. Marinate the sliced pork in the 1½ tablespoons of light soya sauce and the cornstarch. Set aside. Marinate the prawns with the remaining 1 teaspoon of light soya sauce and a pinch of pepper. Set aside.

Heat the oil in a wok. When the oil is hot, fry the garlic for 10 seconds before adding in the pork slices. Add in the fish sauce and rice wine, and continue to fry for 1 minute. Add in the chicken stock and cover the wok for 1 minute, until the stock boils.

Drain the mee sua and add it into the soup. At the same time, add the prawns, then crack the egg into the soup and let it poach. Spread the chye sim over the top. Cover the wok and allow to simmer on medium heat for 2 minutes, or until the mee sua is soft and the ingredients are cooked through. Swirl in the sweet potato solution bit by bit, until the soup thickens to a desired consistency. It should be sticky, but not cloying.

Add a pinch of salt and 1 tablespoon of soya sauce, adding additional to taste if desired. Transfer to a serving bowl. Add the sesame oil and a pinch of pepper, garnish with the coriander, and serve immediately.

P₁₆/Soups

BLACK FUNGUS EGG DROP SOUP

- 10 g dried black fungus, soaked in cool water until soft
- 10 g dried lily buds, soaked in cool water until soft
- 300 g lean pork, thinly sliced
- 2 tsp cornstarch
- 1½ tbsp light soya sauce
- 20 g hei bee (dried shrimps)
- 2 tbsp oil
- 1 ℓ chicken stock (pg.2), or 1 ℓ water mixed with ½ cube chicken bouillon
- 1 egg, beaten
- salt
- 2 stalks spring onion, finely chopped
- 1 stalk coriander
- white pepper powder

Remove the black fungus from the water. Trim off any hard tips and cut each floret into smaller pieces. Remove the lily buds from the water and tie each into a knot. Set aside.

Marinate the pork slices in the cornstarch and light soya sauce. Set aside. Wash the hei bee and set aside to dry.

Heat the oil in a wok over high heat. Add in the dry hei bee and lower the heat to medium. Stir for about 1½ minutes, until fragrant. Remove the hei bee and set aside.

Pour the chicken stock into a pot and bring to a boil. Add the fried hei bee and marinated pork, and boil for 5 minutes. Add in the black fungus and lily buds then continue boiling on medium heat for 15-20 minutes. Stir in the egg. Season to taste with salt, then boil for 3 minutes more. Throw in the spring onions before ladling out the soup into bowls. Garnish with the coriander and a pinch of pepper.

P₁₇/

PORK AND TOFU SOUP BAK KEE TNG



- 300 g pork shoulder, thinly sliced
- 3 tbsp light soya sauce, plus additional for adjusting the soup
- white pepper powder
- salt
- 5 tbsp sweet potato flour
- 600 ml pork stock (pg.3)
- ½ cube chicken bouillon
- ½ block (about 125 g) silken tofu, sliced into small cubes
- 1 handful dried seaweed, cut into 5cm squares
- sesame oil, for drizzling
- 2 stalks spring onion, finely chopped
- Chinese celery, chopped, to garnish

Marinate the pork slices in the light soya sauce and a pinch of pepper. Boil some water in a pot with a sprinkling of salt. Coat the pork slices well with the sweet potato flour, then cook them in the water for 5 minutes, until cooked. Drain the pork slices, then place in a bowl of cold water. Set aside.

In a separate pot, boil the pork stock over high heat. Dissolve the bouillon cube in the stock. Add in the tofu and continue boiling for 5 to 10 minutes. In the meantime, soak the seaweed till soft and wash well to remove any sand. Drain well, then add into the pot. Boil for 5 minutes more before adding in the cooked pork slices. Season to taste with salt and/or light soya sauce, then drizzle with some sesame oil. Throw in the spring onion before ladling the soup into a large serving bowl or individual bowls. Garnish with the Chinese celery and a pinch of pepper.

Tip

I recommend using pork shoulder as it has a nice mix of fat in with the meat.

P18/Soups

PIG'S STOMACH SOUP

TOO THOR TH'NG

- 15 g white pepper seeds
- 300 g soft bone pork ribs
- 1 piece (500-600 g) fresh pig's stomach, cleaned (see tip)
- 1 thumb-sized piece ginger, smashed
- 1½ ℓ chicken stock (pg.2), or 1½ ℓ water mixed with ½ cube chicken bouillon
- 100 g canned ginkgo nuts
- salt
- 1 stalk coriander, chopped

Toast the white pepper seeds in a dry pan over low-medium heat for 1-2 minutes, stirring constantly to ensure they don't burn. Allow to cool slightly, then crack them lightly in a mortar and pestle.

Place the ribs in a pot of salted water and bring to a boil for 5 minutes. Drain the ribs.

Place the ribs, cleaned pig's stomach, white pepper, ginger and chicken stock into a large pot and bring to a boil for 30 minutes over high heat. Reduce to medium-low heat, add in the ginkgo nuts and simmer for 2 hours.

Remove the stomach and allow to cool. Slice into thin strips (about 2cm by 5cm) and return to the broth. Add salt to taste. Garnish with coriander before serving.

Tip

How to clean pig's stomach:

- ½ cup salt
- 1 cup flour or tapioca flour
- 2 cups white rice vinegar

Rub a handful of salt liberally on the surface of the stomach. Turn it inside out and rub on another generous layer of salt vigorously, like washing a dirty cloth. Then, rub the flour on the insides and outsides of the stomach. Rinse well with running water to get rid of the salt and flour. By now, some of the slimy and greasy residue should be removed. Use a knife to scrape the stomach, removing other impurities on the lining. Rinse under cool running water. Repeat the above steps twice more, until the gamey smell is almost gone. Then, pour the vinegar over the stomach and give it a good rub, inside and out. Rinse the vinegar off with cool running water. This step will remove the smell completely. Boil the stomach for 5 minutes, then soak it in very cold water. Scrape away any residual impurities on the stomach and set aside.

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LOTUS ROOT SOUP WITH SOFT BONE PORK RIBS

- 250 g lotus root, washed thoroughly, peeled and sliced 4mm-thick
- 300 g soft bone pork ribs, chopped into bite-sized pieces
- 5 red dates
- 4 pieces dried cuttlefish, soaked
- 4 cloves garlic, or more if you desire
- 3 Chinese dried figs
- 1 ℓ chicken stock (pg.2), or 1 ℓ water mixed with ½ cube chicken bouillon
- 5 water chestnuts, washed, peeled and slightly smashed
- salt

Place all the ingredients into a pot and bring to a boil on high heat for 20 minutes. Skim away any foam that rises to the surface, then simmer for another 1-2 hours on low heat. Season to taste with salt if necessary, before serving.

WHITE RADISH SOUP



- 300 g pork ribs, chopped into bite-sized pieces
- 1 white radish (about 200 g), chopped into large cubes
- 8 red dates
- 2 pieces dried cuttlefish, soaked
- 6 dried oysters, soaked
- 4 cloves garlic
- 2 slices ginger
- 1 ℓ chicken stock (pg.2), or 1 ℓ water mixed with ½ cube chicken bouillon salt

Place all the ingredients into a pot and bring to a boil on high heat for 20 minutes. Skim away any foam that rises to the surface, then simmer for another 1-2 hours on low heat. Season to taste with salt if necessary, before serving.

PORK RIB SOUP BAK KUT TEH

- 2 ℓ water
- 600-800 g pork ribs
- 3 heads garlic, whole
- 3 pieces dang shen (codonopsis root)
- 3 star anises
- 3 slices kam chou (raw liquorice)
- 2 Chinese dried figs
- 8 slices yuk chuk (Solomon's seal rhizome)
- 1 tbsp dark soya sauce
- 1 tbsp light soya sauce
- 1 tbsp oyster sauce
- 1 heaped tsp sugar
- 1 tsp salt, plus additional for adjusting
- ½ cube chicken bouillon
- 1 small handful coriander, chopped

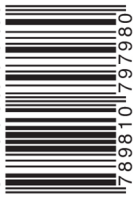
Bring the water to boil in a large pot. Add in the rest of the ingredients, except for the chicken bouillon and coriander. Boil for 30 minutes. Skim off any foam that rises to the surface of the soup, then add the chicken bouillon and stir till dissolved.

Lower the heat to medium and continue cooking for another 10 minutes. Ladle the soup into bowls and garnish with the coriander before serving.

Tip

Serve hot with steaming white rice and side dishes of braised tau pok (fried bean curd), you tiao (deep-fried crullers) and stewed kiam chye (pickled mustard greens)

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