



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

Chef Vanessa Lim has switched focus from Asian dishes to Middle Eastern ones with her new eatery, Tash.

Vanessa Lim: East meets West

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Rarely do you find a chef/restaurant owner who so successfully transforms herself from a student from Malaysia to chef to restaurant entrepreneur as has Vanessa Lim. And for longtime Washingtonians, they will remember fondly the fuss and enthusiasm over the opening on 19th Street NW of Oodles Noodles, preceded a few months earlier by the opening of Spices, a pan-Asian cafe on upper Connecticut Avenue. That is quite a journey for a young lady who came to the United States to get a master's degree in business and ended up as a restaurant entrepreneur.

This shift in her life's focus came about when Lim took a waitress job to help pay her student bills. "I ended up working part-time as a server in Cafe Asia [formerly on 19 Street NW]," she says. "I saw how hard they worked. ... After the Washington Post review, they got very busy." The chef and the co-owner, Jessie Yan, became a good friend and, ultimately, Lim's business partner in her future ventures.

Their first enterprise began when the two opened the then-small Spices, a 1,000-square-foot eatery that they assembled themselves. "We started with nothing," she says. "We did our own painting, wrapped our own chairs and renovated everything except the kitchen." That was in 1994, and to get an idea of popular pan-Asian dishes to feature, the pair traveled throughout Asia to compile a menu that today features such dishes as grilled chicken satay, Chinese and Thai fried rice, Malaysian curry laksa and sushi.

What is your comfort food?

Noodle soup, no doubts. I was craving it right after I got off the plane in the U.S. Rice soup, especially when you are sick. Whenever I go home to Malaysia, my mom makes me noodle or rice soup.

What is your favorite ingredient?

That's tough because we use a lot. In Persia [Iran], it is anise. And in my home, it is onion and garlic.

What's in your fridge?

I don't eat much at home, but eggs, chilies, vegetables, tofu, kimchee and sour pickles.

What is your luckiest moment?

When I have my kids. I feel very blessed that God gave them to me.

Where is your favorite place in the world?

Hong Kong. I go back many times more than my own country. Then Paris.

If you go Tash Persian Restaurant

- » **Where:** 524 Eighth St. SE
- » **Info:** 202-733-1133; tashrestaurant.com
- » **Hours:** Open for lunch and dinner daily

Spices was a big success from day one, says Lim. But the first night, their electricity died on them. They had to close for a day to figure out what went wrong. When they reopened, and with the problems solved, Spices became such a huge success that it led to their next venture.

Just one year later, Lim and Yan went into the 19th Street NW business area to open the instantly successful Oodles Noodles, which Phyllis Richman, a former restaurant reviewer for the Washington Post, praised one month after the restaurant opened. After that, business boomed, and within sev-

eral years, Lim and Yan renamed the restaurant Nooshi and continued to serve the same noodle and sushi dishes. Today the restaurant also offers grilled dishes and other Asian treats. (A second Nooshi has just opened on Capitol Hill.)

Oodles Noodles was such a big hit that Lim and Yan opened a second location in Bethesda, but the venue was too small for the concept. But they did open for a few brief years a very upscale Chinese restaurant called Yanyu, an elegant eatery with Yan in the kitchen accompanied by a hand-picked Chinese chef and a special oven for roasting duck.

Although Yanyu only lasted about seven years, Lim and Yan traveled again throughout Asia, eating and sampling dishes from many different countries. Upon returning to D.C., they worked at polishing each recipe to appeal to an American audience. Now Lim, with the help of Yan and Lim's husband, Nariman Modanlou, has launched a totally new concept: Tash, a cozy, colorful eatery that features contemporary Middle Eastern food. And upstairs above Tash? The second Nooshi.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

Blind tasting of Washington wines: Part 1, the whites

For the last 50 years, the state of Washington has quietly but steadily been producing a bevy of tasty wines ranging from crisp, dry whites to spicy, bold reds and just about everything in between.

According to the Washington Wine Center's website, the wine industry has been around in various incarnations since the first wine grapes were planted at Fort Vancouver by the Hudson's Bay Co. in 1825. It wasn't until the 1960s, when commercial wine grape planting took hold, that Washington began to attract national attention. The floodgates opened, and the resulting rapid expansion of the industry exploded in the mid-'70s.

Currently, there are 13 recognized American Viticultural Areas, which encompass more than 43,000 acres planted with 30 different varieties of grapes by 350 growers who produce more than 12 million cases of table wine. Those staggering numbers make Washington the second-largest wine-producing state in the country.

In order to spread the word on Washington wines — and get a broader range of feedback — I decided to assemble a panel of enthusiastic amateur wine consumers to help me taste more than 20 white wines. The varieties included chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, riesling, pinot gris and viognier.

To make it interesting, I concealed the wine's identity in an attempt to solicit untainted opinions. The results, complete with some of the more interesting comments from the panelists, are listed below in order of preference. Next week, I will take on Washington's delicious red wines. Retail prices are approximate.

The big hit of the tasting appeared to be the ultra-balanced **2010 Chateau Ste. Michelle Eroica Riesling (\$20)** from the Columbia Valley.

Originally conceived as a collaboration between world-renowned German winemaker Dr. Ernst Loosen and the winemaker for Chateau Ste. Michelle, Bob Bertheau, this off-dry wine has a lovely bouquet of nectarines and honeysuckle. The abundant acidity keeps the fresh fruit flavors of apples and peaches energized and the sweetness in check all the way through to the end of the medium

finish. One panelist declared, "It smells like honeysuckle flowers!" **QPR 9.5**

Rhone varieties seem to like the climate in the southeast corner of the state. The **2010 Cougar Crest Estate Grown Viognier (\$20)**, located in the Walla Walla AVA, displays a pretty nose of orange blossoms and apricot. Wonderful flavors of pear, melon and white fig dominate the front of the palate, while interesting notes of butterscotch and honey glide through on the rich, fat finish. As Sarah summed it up beautifully, "Great wine. I would serve this and be proud of it!" **QPR 9**

Evidently, the cool nights and warm days are an ideal climate for growing chenin blanc, which is critical in the production of the bright acidity that lets the true nature of the fruit shine through in the **2012 L'Ecole Chenin Blanc (\$14)** from the Columbia Valley. Stylish scents of white flowers and tropical fruits are prominent on the bouquet, while citrusy flavors of grapefruit, nectarine and mango fall on to the wonderfully refreshing finish. As Linda said, "Nice. I like it! I'd buy it." **QPR 9**

While many winemakers produce a chardonnay, I had to look twice at the price listed on the remarkable **2011 Tamarack Cellars Chardonnay (\$15)** from Walla Walla. Refreshing notes of white peach, nectarine and pineapple on the nose are very fragrant. Rich flavors of green apple, ripe pear and tropical fruit coat the entire palate on the way to the clean, medium-bodied finish, where a touch of vanilla and butterscotch add depth and elegance. Nicole had a very sophisticated comment: "I really liked the taste!" Hey, whatever works. **QPR 10**

The Horse Heaven Hills AVA is located in the southeastern part of the Columbia Valley and is home to the **2012 Canoe Ridge "The Expedition" Pinot Gris (\$14)**. This refreshing wine is bursting with aromas of grapefruit and nectarine on the nose and palate. Additional flavors of tropical fruit and ripe apple appear on the bright finish, where crisp acidity balances out the juicy flavors that linger on and on. Carolyn summed it up with, "It reminds me of Provence." **QPR 9.5**

Note: QPR is a rating system that compares the quality a wine delivers relative to the price. A QPR of 10 is considered an excellent value.

