

## Roger Mooking, Host of 'Man, Fire, Food'

Roger Mooking, host of "Man Fire Food," visited Portland recently to film a show for his popular Cooking Channel series, "Man, Fire, Food." The episode, which features Jason French of Ned Ludd restaurant on N.E. Martin Luther King Boulevard in Portland, will air Dec. 11 and 30. A third-generation chef and restaurateur, Mooking's cuisine draws from a rich mix of global food traditions. Mooking is also a musician and the author of the cookbook, *Everyday Exotic*. The Skanner News spoke to Mooking on the phone Tuesday, Nov. 20.

**TSN:** Is it true that you are the third generation in your family to be a chef and restaurateur?

**RM:** Yes, it's true. My grandfather came from China and ended up in Trinidad, in the Caribbean. There, after many years, he eventually opened a bakery and restaurant. Then he moved his restaurant to Los Angeles. My father ran that restaurant for many years, and my aunts and uncles still own and operate restaurants and catering companies. So it's in the blood. I come by it honestly.

**TSN:** Did you ever think about doing anything else?

**RM:** Yes, for sure. When I was three years old I knew I wanted to be a chef, but when I was around 15 I started dabbling in music and that really took off. So I've done music professionally since I was about 15 or 16 as well. I continue in both of those endeavors.

**TSN:** What is your first food memory?

**RM:** One most definitely is standing up on a chair at the counter and learning how to make wontons with my father. I was very young, probably 3 or 4. I was always interested in the kitchen, and any opportunity I could to climb up in the kitchen and see what people are doing, or if my grandmother was cooking to check up on what she was up to. I was always there you know.

**TSN:** You are Canadian now though?

**RM:** I was born in Trinidad and when I was 5 my family moved to Canada. I do have a lot of memories of Trinidad, strangely, but also I have been back many times since. All my aunts and uncles still live in Trinidad and a lot of friends, so I keep contact—especially now with social media.



Roger Mooking with Jason French of Ned Ludd restaurant on N.E. Martin Luther King Boulevard

**TSN:** Tell us about your family's food traditions, because you have this wonderful rich mix of cultural influences?

**RM:** Definitely! Well, my grandfather, like I said, was Chinese fare and he used to cook traditional Chinese fare for my father growing up. So a lot of these recipes have passed down to our household. But you know we were born and raised in Trinidad and that has a very interesting mix of traditions also. There is a large African population, a large Carib Indian population—the indigenous population; there is a large Chinese population, and a large East Indian population. So all of those food traditions are an integral part of what makes up Trinidadian cuisine. We learned a lot from Trinidad alone, but my grandfather being from China, there was a heavy influence from that. And then our family moved to Edmonton, Alberta, which has a large Ukrainian and Polish population. So my mother had made friends with an elderly Ukrainian baba, and when I walked in after school, they would be making pirogues and cabbage rolls, and kielbasa and all of this stuff. All of those come together.

**TSN:** What is your signature as a chef?

**RM:** I like to take comfort foods, whether they are Asian comfort foods or North American comfort foods, and give them a little bit of a twist. So I might take something like macaroni and cheese and give it a twist with some curry and asparagus. Or if it's a burger, I'm going to make a lamb burger with five-spice powder. Those are the kinds of things you'll see on my other show, "Everyday Exotic". I do a lot of recipes for many different publications, and I think people come to me for a little bit of flair, a little bit of spice, a little bit of heat and just a little bit of an interesting, inventive twist on regular foods.

**TSN:** Where do you live now and do you cook at home?

**RM:** I live in Toronto now, and I travel quite a bit with my

work, but when I am home I am the designated cook.

**TSN:** We are all thinking about Thanksgiving this week, but you don't have that in Canada do you?

**RM:** We had our Thanksgiving last month, and it's very similar food. We have the usual sweet potatoes turkey and stuffing, cranberries and so on. This year my family did a potluck and strangely nobody brought a cranberry dish and nobody brought ham. But we had a couple of turkeys.

**TSN:** Can you give us one tip for any cook hosting a big celebration?

**RM:** Make a list. Make a plan and make sure you have some dishes prepared ahead of time so you can just reheat them and keep them warm. Those last few minutes can be busy, but if you have prepared in advance you can keep it really simple.

**TSN:** Your new show Man Fire Food is all about barbecue. So what's the biggest thing you have ever barbecued?

**RM:** The biggest is I would have to say would be a whole cow. We went to an event called Bovinova in South Carolina. This is an annual fundraiser and these are entrepreneurs and business men who do this event for charity. So they built this contraption with pulleys and 7,000 lbs of steel. It's quite a contraption; you have to see it. So they hoist the cow onto this grate and it spins and turns. It took seven guys to hoist the cow onto this thing and it cooks for 24 hours. It's quite a spectacle.

**TSN:** And the smallest?

**RM:** That would have to be a clam.

'My mother had made friends with an elderly Ukrainian baba, and when I walked in after school, they would be making pirogues and cabbage rolls, and kielbasa and all of this stuff'

**TSN:** What about the health experts who are telling us that barbecue is bad for us and causes cancer and so on. What do you think about that?

**RM:** Well, I read a lot of different information from a lot of different sources and apparently everything will give you cancer. So, I do follow the latest information. But at the end of the day, I've got to be honest, I defer to what my grandmother told me growing up. She said, "All things in moderation at all times."

So I'm not going to be making barbecue every single day of my life. I'm not going to be eating hot food every day of my life. I'm not going to be making Chinese food every day of my life or Caribbean food every day. I like to mix up everything always, whether it's a cooking technique: steam-

See FIRE FOOD on page 10

## SWEET WAYS

continued from page 8

unblended soup; stir to combine.

Add tomatoes, scallion and 1 tablespoon cilantro; bring to a boil. Serve hot and garnish with cilantro.

### Sweet Corn and Ricotta Fritters

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

- 2 ears fresh Florida sweet corn, kernels removed
- 1/2 bunch fresh cilantro, chopped fine
- 4 ounces low-fat ricotta cheese
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 1/3 cup self-rising unbleached or whole-wheat flour salt and fresh groundpepper
- Olive oil (for shallow pan frying)

In medium-sized bowl, combine corn, cilantro, ricotta, eggs, flour and a pinch of salt and pepper.

Add a small amount of olive oil to a medium-high preheated sauté pan. Carefully add spoonfuls of corn mixture to hot pan. Cook on both sides until golden brown. Test the first done fritter, and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. Serve with low-fat sour cream if desired.

### Kitchen Tips for Kids

Get the kids involved in buying, prepping and cooking corn. Here's what they need to know to help you in the kitchen:

~ Look for fresh sweet corn with the husk still attached. They should feel and look moist and plump, with the kernels inside fat and shiny. The silk of the corn should be a little sticky and should look glossy, stiff and moist.

~ To shuck: Grasp the husks and pull down to expose the kernels. Continue until all the husks and silk-like hairs have been removed.

~ To remove kernels: Hold corn cob upright by the tip, with the large end solidly down on the table. Take a small sharp knife and cut down, removing the corn kernels. Be careful not to cut too deep and remove parts of the cob.

To get more fresh ideas for cooking with corn, visit <http://bit.ly/floridacorn>.

**NEW SEASONS MARKET**

**Close to home**

Enjoy the Northwest's Home Grown harvest this fall. Discover our bounty of Northwest seafood, locally-raised meats, cheese from Oregon creameries, and pumpkins, squash, pears and apples from all around Oregon and Washington. Feed your family fresh, local food from close to home.

**HAWTHORNE • 503.236.4800**  
4034 SE Hawthorne Blvd

**SEVEN CORNERS • 503.445.2888**  
1954 SE Division Street

[newseasonsmarket.com](http://newseasonsmarket.com)