

Chef Molly Yeh's lockdown life full of recipes, baby firsts

By Kelli Kennedy
The Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Somewhere between testing beet and carrot juice, blueberries, and mint in search of the precise hues for a four-tiered rainbow cake celebrating her daughter's first birthday in spring 2020, Food Network star Molly Yeh was forced by COVID's gathering storm clouds to abruptly cancel the party she'd spent six months planning.

The food blogger and author of *Molly on the Range* had already sketched the tablescape, sent hand-drawn invites incorporating the vegetable theme, and crafted cute marzipan carrots as cake toppers.

Since then, the 32-year-old Yeh has balanced the daily frustrations and isolation of quarantine life with the many joyful firsts of her toddler, Bernie. The constant that has held it together is food, or in Yeh's case, tahini. She's fond of incorporating her favorite ingredient in original recipes that fuse her Chinese and Jewish heritage.

"Food has truly taken on a different meaning, both in starting a family and also in the pandemic," says Yeh, who lives on a

sugar beet farm with her husband and baby near the Minnesota-North Dakota border.

The young family never went to a restaurant and rarely ordered takeout, cooking from scratch and finding delight in Bernie's milestones, despite monotonous routines and seemingly endless household chores.

"There were so many special moments that were happening in this terrible thing around us," says Yeh, who recently caught up with The Associated Press while in town for the South Beach Wine and Food Festival. "Imagine your first time smelling and tasting fresh bread, your first time baking cookies."

The kitchen became the source of field trips and experiments. There was a fake vacation to Florence, Italy, where the family pulled out the pasta maker and made homemade pizzas. There was a day trip to the Italian Alps, a.k.a. a nearby hill where they sledded on an inflatable unicorn. And blissful spa days were coconut baths with a face mask and book during Bernie's naptime.

Yeh, the star of Food Network's "Girl Meets Farm" show, has been a bright spot in a gloomy year for many viewers, with her infectious smile, recipe mashups (think



harissa honey labne, hummus dumplings, kale matzo pizza, and bacon and egg drop soup), and endearing habit of liberally dousing desserts with homemade sprinkles or marzipan.

Pretzel challah was among the first recipes that gained traction on her blog, "My Name is Yeh." And she's delighted to report that her daughter's art canvas of choice is painting egg wash on a braided loaf.

Yeh has experienced a rough pandemic year full of pitfalls and pivots like the rest of us. She shackled up with her in-laws while overseeing a massive home renovation, and started work on a new cookbook, *Where The Eggs Are*, featuring easier, go-to weekday meals.

While these recipes are less fussy, Yeh has never shied away from celebratory and sometimes labor-intensive dishes. She grew up in the kitchen with her mother, making everything from scratch, finding

comfort in the rituals and routines — perfect preparation for pandemic life.

Early in 2020, as Americans baked their way through the uncertainty, Yeh's older cake recipes became popular again, including carrot cake with hawaij (a Middle Eastern spice) and tahini caramel frosting; chocolate cake with halva filling and tahini frosting; and mini pumpkin loaf cakes with cream cheese glaze and candied bacon.

The new mom admits she struggled when she realized she's not the fun parent. "It's become clear that Nick is the fun one, dancing and singing and spinning her up in the air," she says.

But food has fixed that too.

"I get to see Bernie's face when she eats my chicken noodle soup, and I get to fill the house with the smell of mac and cheese when she wakes up from her nap," she says.

Yeh met her husband when they were students at Juilliard, and made her debut at Carnegie Hall as a percussionist at age 17. Her father, John Bruce Yeh, plays clarinet with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and was their first Asian-American member when he joined in 1977.

One of her favorite moments on her show was cooking chicken pot stickers, scallion pancakes with maple syrup slaw, and, of course, a sprinkle cake, before performing a Bach invention with the man she calls her biggest musical inspiration.

"It's that same creative, special, joyous feeling that I get making cake and making food for other people that I get from playing music for people that I love," said Yeh. "If life can be a lot of those moments strung together, that's a life I want to live."



YABBA DABBA DISPUTE. Florence Fang talks with reporters after a news conference outside her Flintstone House in Hillsborough, California, in this April 11, 2019 file photo. Fang and her attorney say they've been fighting for the rights of property owners and Fred and Barney fans everywhere. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

Yabba dabba dispute resolved. Florence Fang's Fred Flintstone can stay.

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nuisance.

An attorney for the town previously said residents are required to get a permit before installing such sculptures, regardless of the theme.

Hillsborough went to court in 2019 after Fang failed to comply with multiple stop-work orders, as well as an order to remove the features around the multimillion-dollar property with its 2,730-square-foot home. Fang counter-sued. *The Daily Post* in Palo Alto first reported news of the settlement in late June.

Mark Hudak, an attorney for

Hillsborough, previously said the town prides itself on its rural, woodsy feel, and rules are in place "so neighbors don't have to look at your version of what you would like to have, and you don't have to look at theirs."

According to records, the settlement stipulates that the town will review and approve a survey of the landscaping improvements. In turn, Fang will apply for building permits. The town will also pay Fang \$125,000, and she will drop the lawsuit — which was dismissed in state court on April 27.

No news on Barney Rubble's role in the matter.

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