



## Authentic 'culture on a plate'

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# The art of the blank canvas



For Washington, D.C.-based designer My Ly, "Every line you draw is meaningful." Photo by Albert Ting

Since launching [My Ly Design](#) in 2016, My Ly, a multidisciplinary designer based in Washington, D.C., found clients through networking. A chance meeting with Chef Carla Hall gave Ly the opportunity to work with the TV personality and husband Matthew Lyons on a significant home renovation.

discovery+ featured the project on "[My Dream Kitchen](#)," a show following chefs Giada De Laurentiis and Hall as they create the kitchen they've always wanted. Although Hall and Lyons have different approaches to how they live, Ly discovered ways to merge their distinct styles.

"They both trusted me to guide them through the process," Ly says. "They both have very strong visions, but they never had an issue. It was very cohesive."

Although Ly always enjoyed art and creative pursuits while growing up in Boston, Massachusetts, she pursued mechanical engineering instead of art at Northeastern University in Boston. She left before graduating but started at the Boston Architectural College a few years later. She earned degrees in architecture and design studies in 2005. Ly worked full-time at two architectural firms during the day, where she gained a wide range of experience, and attended classes at night.

## 'Everything is designed with intent'

After graduation, Ly moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to work with WRT Design. For eight years, she worked on a variety of projects, from city planning in Asia to skyscrapers in New York.

"I was always a blank canvas-type person," Ly says. "Here's the project, come up with something."

In the early stages of a project, Ly collects data, and learns about the history in a neighborhood, trends

and codes, all while thinking about building for the future. She considers who will use the building, what materials will be high-performing and what technology is required.

"Every line you draw is meaningful," she says. "Everything is designed with intent."

Within her firm, Ly partners with experts to develop commercial, residential and urban design for corporations, government, private entities and nonprofits. Her strength is in identifying a need and finding a creative solution to address it. In one situation, when a post-pandemic environment left office buildings empty, Ly envisioned residential or multi-use space.

"You have to switch gears and see where needs are," she says. "If something changes in the climate, you have to still be relevant and still do important work."

Ly also creates public art. She's proud of Anthem Row, a plaza on the east end of D.C. Within her design, Ly built a 30-foot structure, capable of holding a 10-foot by-10-foot sculpture. Each season, Ly designs and builds a sculpture to hang from the structure.

In December 2025, Ly created the National Mistletoe, an 800-pound art installation showcasing holiday greenery and decorations, suspended above Anthem Row. On Dec. 13, 1,435 couples gathered at 5 p.m. to kiss, earning a place in the [Guinness World Records](#) for the largest number of couples gathering in one location and kissing beneath the mistletoe.

"I wanted to showcase Washington, D.C., with a magical holiday tradition," Ly says, "with a kiss under the National Mistletoe."

# From wartime trauma to decades of happiness

When Scott Harrison served in the Vietnam War, a music box his sister sent him provided the coping mechanism he needed to calm down as he struggled. While Frédéric Chopin's "Tristesse" played, the young soldier envisioned a carousel in a mountain meadow.

Harrison returned to his native Texas after being injured during the war. Although he attended college and worked for Amnesty International, he had trouble reintegrating into society. As the image of the carousel kept returning, Harrison wondered if he could bring this carousel to life. He'd spend the next several decades working toward this dream.

In 2010, Harrison opened Carousel of Happiness on Memorial Day inside a shopping center in Nederland, Colorado, 20 minutes outside of Boulder. The carousel has seen more than 1.3 million riders in the past 16 years. The nonprofit's mission is "dedicated to inspiring happiness, well-being, and service to others through stories and experiences."

"Scott had never been on a carousel," says Allie Wagner, Carousel of Happiness' outreach coordinator. "He didn't have a connection to a carousel. There was something about the song that reminded him of a big grassy meadow in a mountain field, children playing and picnicking. That was really the vision that helped bring him comfort in a time when he needed it."

## A dream, a carousel and a nonprofit

In the 1980s Harrison used leftover wood to build his first animal, "Rabbit the First." Although Rabbit was too heavy to be on the carousel, the carving sits on the sign outside the nonprofit. Harrison began researching folk tales, how indigenous communities connect with animals and how to carve with basswood from the Linden tree, a light wood often used to create carousel animals. He built more than 50 one-of-a-kind animals. When he ran out of space, neighbors stored them.

"He figured out how to do this all on his own," Wagner explains. "It was the way he healed from the trauma of war."

In 1986, Harrison found an empty carousel shell built in 1910. Once he got the carousel working - after reading old patents to figure out how it operated - he added his animals. By this time, Harrison and his wife, Ellen, had moved to Nederland, a town with 1,500 residents, where the couple continues to live. The community raised \$700,000 to keep the carousel in place.



More than 1.3 million people have ridden Scott Harrison's Carousel of Happiness since its 2010 debut in Nederland, Colorado. Photo by James Dewalt

Funding from \$3 rides on the carousel, grants, individual donations, gift shop purchases and the adoption program support the nonprofit and the restoration and upkeep of the carousel. Reel Inspired Media released "Carving Joy" in 2020, a short film about Harrison. Half of the proceeds from the film rental support Carousel of Happiness.

As the outreach coordinator, Wagner gives presentations at assisted living centers, schools and other community organizations. On the day after her visit, residents can ride the carousel, which is accessible to everyone.

Wagner started a podcast in 2025 to increase awareness about the carousel, share the origin story, and interview staff and volunteers at the organization. She shares her journey with the carousel and how it influenced her to follow her curiosities.

"It's an invitation to find your carousel, your artistic project that allows you to express yourself in a unique way," Wagner says. "Go do the wacky, fun, life-changing thing that you never thought was possible."

# The abstract paintings of Keith Teo



"Extroverted Introvert" by Keith Teo, 2022 oil on canvas and wood 150cm x 120cm



"Wholesome Prison" by Keith Teo, 2022 Oil on linen 160cm x 120cm

Singaporean painter Keith Teo's abstract practice explores how color, material and process shape perception.

Born in 1992 in Singapore, Teo is an abstract painter whose artistry brings sensation, materiality and perception to the foreground. He studied fine arts at the LASALLE College of the Arts in his native country and graduated in 2015. Since then, his work has developed through consistent experimentation with the intersection of the machine-made, the digital and the analog. Teo articulates his artistic inquiries by focusing on building up color and form on the canvas.

Rather than beginning with predetermined outcomes, Teo's painting process incorporates complex layering of different paint colors and contrasting brushstrokes. When dealing with his materials, he interrupts any sense of normalcy with gashes in the canvas or strong dashes of paint. Set against a bright pink background, Teo's painting, "Wholesome Prison," reflects his intuitive way of working, combining bold shapes, layered colors and unexpected marks to create an image that feels active, uncertain and open to interpretation rather than planned or fixed.

His commitment to abstraction is shaped by an awareness of current conversations about identity. This sensibility is not articulated through explicit imagery but quietly embedded in his work, such as "Extroverted Introvert." Here, thick layers of paint

and sudden interruptions emphasize Teo's interest in materiality and disruption, and heighten the tension between chance and structure that is central to Teo's understanding of abstraction.

Teo has been recognized for his contributions to contemporary painting. He was awarded the Highly Commended prize in the Established Artist Category of the 2021 United Overseas Bank Painting of the Year competition, the longest-running art competition in Singapore, and was a finalist for the Clifton Art Prize in 2017. His works have been exhibited across Southeast Asia, including presentations in Singapore and Malaysia. Recent and upcoming exhibitions include 39+ Art Space, S.E.A Focus, AC43 Gallery, Art Expo Malaysia and Richard Koh Fine Art. He has also participated in commissioned and collaborative projects with Raffles Dhevanafushi Maldives, Wildlife Reserve Singapore and Supermama. His works have been featured in The Straits Times, Channel NewsAsia, Art & Market (A&M) and the S.E.A Focus 2023 Artist Feature.

Alongside his studio practice, Teo has been an educator since 2017, teaching at Artify Studio and conducting specialized workshops, including nude drawing workshops, at Straits Clan in 2019. His academic approach emphasizes exploration, critical engagement and the development of individual artistic positions, extending his commitment to process and inquiry beyond the studio and into various learning environments.

# Yuzu: Good to the last drop



Yuzu, an East Asian citrus fruit ranging in color from yellowish green to bright gold, is not widely known in the United States. What Americans are starting to learn, though, is that the fruit's sweet and tangy flavor is a tantalizing addition to jams, spreads, salads and sauces. For example, red yuzu kosho - consisting of salt, hot pepper and yuzu - makes a tart and spicy sauce for grilled scallops. See the recipe below.

Japanese and Korean markets in the U.S. sell various yuzu-based products. Most recognizable are ponzu (a yuzu-based condiment flavored with soy sauce, mirin, rice vinegar, bonito flakes and kombu seaweed) and yuzu tea base (look for "yuja cha" in Korean markets), a type of jam consisting of yuzu peels and pulp with honey or sugar that - when mixed with hot water - soothes sore throats. And it can be another decaffeinated option to go with herbal teas. You'll pay \$5 to \$10 for ponzu or yuzu tea base at most Asian groceries.

By the way, there's nothing mild about yuzu juice. It's even more intense than lemon or lime juice so a little goes a long way, especially in beverages.

## Grilled Scallops With Yuzu Kosho Vinaigrette

4 servings

### Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons yuzu juice
- 1 tablespoon scallions, minced, white part only
- 1 tablespoon red yuzu kosho
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 16 large scallops
- 1 tablespoon flat-leaf parsley leaves, minced
- Kosher salt, to taste

### Directions

Combine the oil, yuzu juice, scallions, yuzu kosho and soy sauce in a bowl and mix well. Put the scallops into a small bowl and pour 1/3 of the yuzu vinaigrette over the scallops; toss to combine.

Heat a gas grill to medium high or build a medium-hot fire in a charcoal grill. Alternatively, heat a cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Grill the scallops, turning once, until golden brown and just cooked through, about 4 minutes. Transfer the scallops to 4 warm serving plates and drizzle the remaining yuzu vinaigrette over the scallops. Garnish with the parsley, season lightly with salt and serve hot.

Recipe credit: Saveur

# A Thompson chef's signature moments



Born in Trinidad, Thompson Hospitality Executive Chef Sean Roopchand developed his love of food at an early age when he was tasked with cooking for his family. Photo courtesy of Sean Roopchand

Is there a better reward for serving a former president and a prime minister than a coveted collection of their autographs?

Sean Roopchand keeps the autographs of former U.S. President Barak Obama and Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, in a notebook by his desk. Just before each leader signed the page, Roopchand added his daughter's name.

"I was personally cooking for (Obama) and I had a team with me," Roopchand says. "I was running back and forth to get the right food for him. He likes fish so I had to make him two kinds of fish dishes. I told the Secret Service, 'After all this hard work, you've got to get me his autograph.'"

Born in Trinidad, an island in the Caribbean, Roopchand developed his love of food at an early age when he was tasked with cooking for his family. He watched "Yan Can Cook," a PBS show featuring Chef Martin Yan, with his cousins and friends and then tried to replicate the food.

In 1987, Roopchand moved to Brooklyn, New York, and worked two newspaper routes and one delivery job. After three years, he saved enough money to start classes at the New York Culinary School. He graduated in 1994 and worked for several companies, including Compass Group for 26 years. He lives in Farmingdale, New York, with his wife and two daughters.

As Thompson Hospitality's corporate chef, Roopchand leads the culinary team, writes menus, develops recipes, and coordinates large events and tastings for clients. Every year, his team of chefs serves clients during corporate functions at venues such as the Lumen Field in Seattle, Washington, and the United Center in Chicago, Illinois.

"We want to show the world what we can do as Thompson Hospitality chefs," Roopchand says.

## Dry-Rubbed Salmon With Tropical Fruit and Kale Salad

10 servings

### Ingredients

#### Dry rub spice mix

- 3 tablespoons smoked paprika
- 1 tablespoon madras curry powder
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon mustard powder
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 teaspoons cayenne pepper
- 2 teaspoons ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons granulated garlic
- Ten 6-ounce salmon fillets

#### Coconut-lime vinaigrette

- 8 ounces red onion, finely diced
- 12 ounces lime juice
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 14 ounces coconut milk
- 6 ounces Coco Lopez (sweetened coconut milk)
- 6 ounces extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 ounces fresh cilantro, chopped

#### Tropical salad

- 1 pound baby kale
- 2 cups ripe papaya, diced
- 2 cups pineapple, diced
- 2 cups kiwi, diced
- 2 cups red bell pepper, julienned

### Directions

Preheat the oven to 400 F.

In a bowl, add the paprika, curry powder, sugar, mustard powder, salt, cayenne pepper, black pepper and granulated garlic for the dry rub spice mix. Toss to combine and set aside.

Coat the salmon fillets with 2 teaspoons of the dry rub. Lay out the salmon fillets onto a baking tray and place them in the oven for 12 minutes or until the internal temperature reaches 145 F.

Remove from the oven and keep hot until ready to serve.

#### For the coconut-lime vinaigrette

In a separate mixing bowl, add the red onion, lime juice and salt. Let sit for 10 minutes. Add the remaining ingredients and whisk until combined. Keep refrigerated until ready to serve.

#### For the tropical salad

In a mixing bowl add the baby kale, papaya, pineapple, kiwi and red pepper. Add 8 ounces of coconut-lime vinaigrette. Lightly toss to combine. Keep refrigerated until ready to serve.

# Authentic 'culture on a plate'



"There's no better validation than knowing the food that nourished my children is something people want," says restaurateur Preeti Waas.

Photo courtesy of Discover Durham

When Preeti Waas received James Beard Foundation nominations for Best Chef Southeast in 2023 and 2024, the honors validated the scratch-made dishes she was serving at her restaurants, Cheeni and Nanny Goat.

"It was game changing," Waas explains. "We were just a little tucked-away place, anonymous. Nobody knew of us or what we were doing. The James Beard Foundation put this enormous spotlight on what we were doing."

Waas grew up in Chennai, India, cooking for her family, eating communally with aunts and uncles. Her mom owned a tailor shop, and at a young age, Waas cooked for her father after school. She learned to cook the simple chicken dishes he enjoyed, but her father's temper and alcoholism affected the experience.

"My feelings about food are complicated," Waas says. "Although our family was very food oriented, my growing up was not pleasant. Cooking kept me alive."

In 1996, Waas visited her sister in Los Angeles, California, where she met her husband, her sister's

co-worker, and eloped two weeks later. The couple lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma, from 2006 to 2012, before moving to Raleigh, North Carolina.

When her two daughters were born, Waas cooked Indian dishes to connect them to their heritage. While the children slept, Waas baked traditional American pastries, at first giving them away, and later selling the sweet treats at the farmer's market. When she had the opportunity to take over a coffee kiosk inside a local YMCA, she changed direction.

"For the first time, I decided to put my culture on a plate," says Waas. "I felt confident enough in myself as a person to tap into my Indian-ness. Until then, I felt as if I had to be as American as possible."

Since 2023, Waas has opened both concepts, Cheeni, a full-service restaurant, and Nanny Goat, a bodega, in Durham.

"Things don't have to be fancy to be good," she says. "I don't have to follow somebody else's set formula. There's no better validation than knowing the food that nourished my children is something people want."

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# Authentic 'culture on a plate'

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## Cabbage Poriyal

By Chef Preeti Waas

6 servings

### Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons sesame or vegetable oil
- 1/2 teaspoon mustard seeds
- 1 teaspoon urad dal
- 10 to 12 curry leaves
- 1 to 2 green chilies, chopped or 1 to 2 dry red chilies, deseeded and broken
- 1/4 cup sliced onions
- 1/4 teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1 pinch asafoetida (hing)
- 4 cups tightly packed chopped or shredded cabbage
- Salt to taste
- 1/4 cup water or add as required
- 3 to 4 tablespoons grated fresh coconut
- 2 tablespoons cilantro leaves, chopped

### Directions

Heat the oil in a shallow pan. Lower the flame and add the mustard seeds; let them crackle. Once the mustard seeds begin to crackle and pop, add the urad dal. Sauté the urad dal on low flame, to prevent burning.

Add the curry leaves, green chilies and the diced onion. Sauté for a minute. Add the turmeric powder and asafoetida. Stir well. Add the shredded cabbage and the salt. Stir well. Add water. Stir again.

Cover the pan with a tight lid. On a low flame, simmer the cabbage until it's cooked. Check after every 5 minutes and give a stir. If the water has dried up and the cabbage is not cooked, sprinkle in more water. Cover and continue to cook until the cabbage becomes tender. There should be no water in the poriyal before you proceed to the next step.

Add the grated coconut and mix very well. Add the cilantro leaves. Serve warm or at room temperature.

**On the cover:** Chef/restaurateur Preeti Waas. Photo courtesy of Discover Durham. Articles on pages 2, 3, 6 and 7 by Vanessa Infanzon. Article on page 4 by Picture That Editorial Team. Published nine times per year, *Unity* is exclusively distributed to clients of Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group, both world leaders in foodservice. To contact us, send an email to [marketing@thompsonhospitalityjv.com](mailto:marketing@thompsonhospitalityjv.com). ©2026 Thompson Hospitality and Compass Group. Produced by [Content Spectrum](http://ContentSpectrum.com).



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