



Women's Best Friends
An animal-themed guide to Valentine's Day gifts **D2**

FASHION | FOOD | DESIGN | TRAVEL | GEAR

OFF DUTY

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



Uncork a Classic
Lettie Teague on the vinous equivalents of 'Moby Dick' **D9**



Saturday/Sunday, February 1 - 2, 2020 | **D1**

Have We Reached Peak Umami?

1908

Japanese chemist Kikunae Ikeda identifies umami as a fifth taste. In 1909, Dr. Ikeda's Ajinomoto company begins producing umami-rich MSG as a flavor enhancer.

1930s

Campbell Soup Co. and other U.S. food companies embrace MSG. It becomes a common source of savory flavor in bouillon cubes, sauces, snacks and fast food.

2000

Researchers at the University of Miami discover the tongue has special receptors for glutamate, lending credence to the concept of umami as a fifth basic taste.

2006

Bravo TV's 'Top Chef' premieres, beaming the term umami into American living rooms. The same year, Momofuku Ssäm Bar opens in NYC; umami is a signature flavor.



What began as an obscure scientific concept and later became a chef's obsession has taken hold of the popular imagination. Now a more balanced approach is replacing umami bombs with newly nuanced recipes

1968

A letter in the New England Journal of Medicine posits that MSG in Chinese food causes numbness, palpitations and weakness. With no basis in science, an MSG scare ensues.

1977

MSG manufacturers, distributors and users band together to launch the Glutamate Association, aiming to rehabilitate MSG's image.

By ELIZABETH G. DUNN

SHORTLY after Momofuku Ssäm Bar opened in New York City, in 2006, the chef David Chang began serving a dish there called *bo ssäm*. The classic Korean recipe calls for boiled pork belly with cabbage leaves and condiments, but in typical Chang fashion, he dialed the flavor up to 11. The Momofuku version starred a pork butt cured overnight and then slow-roasted with a coating of brown sugar and salt that formed a crust the color of mahogany. Diners wrapped ribbons of that roast pork in lettuce along with briny oysters, rice, kimchi, ginger-scallion sauce and *ssamjang*, a spicy Korean dipping sauce. Word of the off-the-menu stunner rippled sensationally through the local dining scene.

The secret to *bo ssäm*'s mind-bending deliciousness was umami—the meaty taste conferred by the amino acid glutamate, which the Japanese chemist Kikunae Ikeda first identified in his dashi broth in 1908. Four basic tastes had prevailed since antiquity: salty, sweet, sour and bitter. Dr. Ikeda argued that umami was a fifth.

Though the term is Japanese, umami is a global phenomenon. The same savory magic in pork and oysters

runs through anchovies, seaweed and mushrooms, not to mention breast milk and amniotic fluid. In addition to glutamate, two other molecules, inosinate and guanylate, emit umami. Aging, caramelizing, drying and fermenting intensify it. Garum, the fermented fish sauce ancient Romans adored, teemed with umami, as do oyster sauce in China, miso in Japan, Worcestershire sauce in England and Maggi seasoning the world over. Dr. Ikeda crystallized glutamate into a sprinkle-on flavor enhancer: monosodium glutamate, or MSG. Today it makes Cool Ranch Doritos and Chick-fil-A sandwiches crave-worthy.

When Momofuku's *bo ssäm* appeared, in 2006, umami was just beginning to gain recognition among American chefs. Since then, Google searches for umami in the U.S. have increased more than tenfold; the tag #umami now accompanies nearly 400,000 Instagram posts. Unilever, the maker of Knorr bouillon—long used as a speedy source of glutamates—reported that sales for the bouillon category surged 5% in 2019 alone. The same year, grocer Trader Joe's, fast-casual restaurant chain Sweetgreen and the Momofuku restaurant group all began

Please turn to page D8

2009

Umami Burger opens in L.A. with a conspicuously glutamate-forward menu. The chain grows to 27 locations, further promoting the taste and the term far and wide.

2019

Merriam-Webster adds 'umami' to its dictionary, fixing the word in the American lexicon and affirming the ascendancy of the flavor—and the concept—in American cuisine.

ILLUSTRATION BY FOLIA SADE ADECO

Inside



LEATHER OR NOT?

Shirt designers are taking the hide road again—despite the sleazy connotations **D3**



SERVICE WITH A STYLE

Worth a pilgrimage: this gas station conceived by Frank Lloyd Wright **D7**



OUR FAVORITE COMIC-TRAGEDIAN

A Q&A with the very funny—except when starring in 'Medea'—Rose Byrne **D5**



HIGHER POWER

Dan Neil on the latest, rather reassuring developments in flying cars **D10**

DESIGN & DECORATING

PILGRIMAGE

Fill 'Er Up, Mr. Wright

This Frank Lloyd Wright gas station helped a coastal elitist fall in love with Minnesota

By Ingela Ratledge Amundson

MY HUSBAND, Anders, is from Duluth, Minn. When he disclosed this fact 16 years ago on the night we met—three vodkas deep at a Manhattan dive bar—I reflexively concluded he'd grown up in a flat, boring, cultural wasteland. Yep, precisely the sort of assumptions that get nitwits like me, raised in Southern California and transplanted to New York, accused of being coastal elites. I discovered how wrong I was during my inaugural, delightful voyage to the Northland a year later. Neither dull nor beige, the landscape teemed with towering spruce and birch trees, brake-testing hills and bracing views of Lake

Superior. Better yet, the terrain was dotted with fascinating structures: Jacobean mansions, midcentury Scandinavian abodes and the Starkey House, by Bauhaus master Marcel Breuer. It wasn't until this winter, however, that I made the trek to the area's most who'd-a-thunk-it treasure: a gas station designed by American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). Located in Cloquet, a town of 12,000 that neighbors the relatively bustling Duluth, the station was constructed in 1958. It was originally conceived in 1932 as part of Wright's Broadacre City, his utopian vision for a decentralized urban community. That plan never came to fruition, but decades later, after completing a home in Cloquet for clients in the oil



CAR CULTURE The prosaic pit stop elevated by America's first starchitect.

MATT SCHMITT/BROADACRE (STATION); NICK BRISTOL (WAREHOUSE); ALAMY (THEATER, CHAPEL); TALIESIN PRESERVATION (CAFÉ)

business, he pitched them the station concept. "It wasn't a hard sell for my grandparents," said Mike McKinney, whose family owned what became the R.W. Lindholm Service Station until 2015. "Wright wanted to take something strictly utilitarian and treat it like a piece of art." As I drove up to an otherwise unremarkable intersection and first glimpsed the

structure—nestled between a laundromat and post office—I couldn't help but smile. With its 60-foot cantilevered copper roof, steep angles and squat, geometric lines, it looks like a funky pagoda sprung from nothing. It's futuristic in an old-fashioned way—a Tomorrowland take on 2020. I spotted Wright's hand in the abundance of glass service-bay doors. "He was al-

ways trying to bring nature in and dissolve the distinction between inside and out," said Tim Quigley, a Minneapolis architect, "and, as with many of his buildings, he used a limited materials palette: painted concrete block, glass, mahogany accents and copper." In the off-white exterior chosen to emulate sand or dried weeds and the "Cherokee" (russet) floors meant to mimic earth, the humble building also reflects Wright's preferred colors, said Mr. Quigley. Chris Chartier, who has worked there since 1982, said certain innovations—like the presence of skylights in what would ordinarily be a dark, cavernous auto shop—make a profound impact: "It feels open and roomy in here, not like other garages." Another fill-'er-upgrade? A windowed second-story lounge for waiting customers, complete with built-in flower planters and restrooms featuring ornate cutouts in the Philippine mahogany plywood

stalls. Alas, noted Mr. Chartier, it rarely fulfills its intended purpose as a hangout. While I poked around, a car arrived on a flatbed truck. A guy refilled his propane tank. The station peddles gas, too, from standard-issue dispensers. (Wright's proposed system of pumps that descended from canopies breached safety

FRANKLY UNEXPECTED / OTHER OFFBEAT STRUCTURES BY THE AMERICAN MASTER



A.D. German Warehouse Richland Center, Wis. With its concrete frieze, this brick warehouse, slated for wholesale grocery storage, was left unfinished in 1921; it's being revived as a heritage site.



Kalita Humphreys Theater Dallas, Texas This c. 1959 theater, with revolving stage, was built simultaneously with the architect's similarly curvaceous Guggenheim Museum in New York.



Pettit Memorial Chapel Belvidere, Ill. The 1907 Prairie-style structure was commissioned by a widow as a cemetery memorial for her late husband. It has been restored twice.



Riverview Terrace Café Spring Green, Wis. The limestone restaurant was completed posthumously in 1967 and intended as a gateway to Wright's neighboring Taliesin estate.

Folks don't stop here to goose their Instagram feeds.

regulations.) The ordinariness of the transactions struck me. These folks aren't here to goose their Instagram feeds. "If this were in a metropolitan area, it probably wouldn't have been turned into a high-end coffee shop or tourist attraction by now," Mr. McKinney said. Instead, the design has been casually, wonderfully folded into people's lives—its pedigree taken for granted.

FRESH PICKS

Vase, Interrupted

Ruohong Wu's oddly graceful earthenware collection, All Different All Equal, joins disparate halves that have emerged from two different slipware molds. When the Chinese native traveled to Jingdezhen, China's "porcelain capital city," the plethora of castoff plastic molds astounded her, and she plucked some. The artist's vases allowed her to attach new meaning to the phrase "made in China," she said. The pointedly imperfect results bridge the gap between traditional pottery techniques and mass production. From \$100, 31-62-659-0116 —Rachel Wolfe



This Monumental Structure Is a...Ring

While fashion designers like Jason Wu pivot to home products, Los Angeles architecture firm Marmol Radziner has done the reverse, carving out a niche in the jewelry market. For its Stone Collection, 18-karat-gold-plated brass is fused with semiprecious gems like Tahitian pearls and amethyst to create unisex earrings, cuffs and rings (the photo above is much enlarged).

Marmol Radziner's metal shop, which also makes architectural hardware, does the fabrication. Robin Cottle, who heads up the jewelry team, said the Stone Collection reflects the design-build firm's aesthetic: "...structured, man-made [but] nevertheless harmonious with the natural landscape." From \$500, Marmol Radziner, 310-826-6222 —Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell

A Bolt From the Past

If you've always rejected floral bedding as too treacly, a soon-to-launch collaboration might let you drift off without compromising your taste. Matouk linens, with heritage textiles company Schumacher, rifled through the latter's expansive archives to pull an 18th-century botanical print that's "delicate but not sweet," said Schumacher creative director Dara Caponigro. "Pomegranates are not an overtly sweet fruit. It has this kind of yin and yang to it." Edged with a gentle scalloping we'd never call frilly, the pattern comes in three colorways. Matouk Schumacher Collection, available in bedding and shower curtains, from \$144, preorder at matouk.com —R.W.



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