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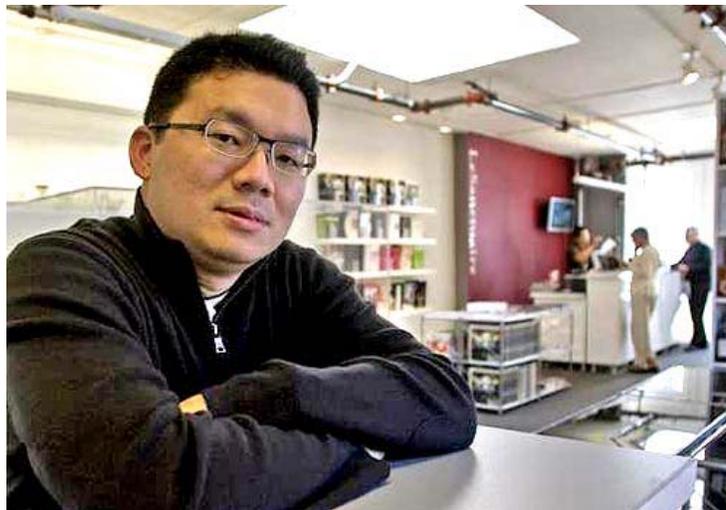
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Food

RESTAURANT JOURNAL

Hey, who moved my fenugreek?

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Randi Lynn Beach / For The Times

Le Sanctuaire owner Jing Tio closed the Santa Monica shop to focus on wholesale and online sales.

By Jenn Garbee
August 22, 2007

THE lights are off and nobody's home at the Santa Monica "culinary boutique" Le Sanctuaire. Where are the window displays of fine bone china and Mauviel copper cookware, all the cookbooks, the Misono knives and the spices?

Indonesian cubeb pepper, Vietnamese cinnamon powder, West African kola nuts -- Le Sanctuaire owner Jing Tio scoured the globe for the best dried herbs, seeds and bark he could find. And for the last four years, in-the-know shoppers headed straight for the back of the store, where all the spices were stashed.

According to Tio, business along the L.A. spice route has been booming ever since the store opened in 2003, despite the shop looking more like a 5th Avenue retail showroom than a spice mecca.

So why'd he pack up his spice racks at the end of June and close the Santa Monica location?

Tio says that with the lease up for renewal, skyrocketing rent, a loyal following of online customers, and, most significantly, a thriving wholesale business, he decided to close the retail store on Main Street. He's now focusing on supplying restaurants. In January, he opened a San Francisco showroom and retail space near Union Square. No reason to stay in L.A., he says. He still has a warehouse in Orange County packed with his collection of spices: his own vadouvan mixture (onion, shallot, garlic, cumin, fenugreek, turmeric, curry leaves and mustard), dried rosebuds, and white Muntok pepper from the Tio family farm in Indonesia (he hails from a family of spice growers, naturally).

"When I started this business I was more interested in retail cooking supplies, but I couldn't stop with the spices," Tio says.

His list of clients reads like a who's who of chefs around the world -- David Myers of Sona, Mark Peel of Campanile, Michael Cimarusi of Providence, to name a few locals.

L.A. spice fanatics, don't fret; you can still scour the website (<http://www.le-sanctuaire.com>). But you won't find the Valerie chocolates and fine china online or in San Francisco -- "unless a restaurant wants it, we don't have it anymore," he said.

So if you happen to be looking for a \$3,800 Gastrovac for that Ferran Adrià-inspired weekend molecular gastronomy project, it's here.

--Jenn Garbee

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Small bites

* At Noé Restaurant & Bar, Glen Ishii has taken the helm, succeeding executive chef Robert Gadsby. Ishii, formerly sous chef, is offering Cal-Asian dishes such as wild Alaskan king salmon with green tea soba salad, ikura (salmon eggs) and shiso pesto.

Noé Restaurant & Bar, Omni Los Angeles Hotel, 251 S. Olive St., Los Angeles, (213) 356-4100, noerestaurant.com.http://noerestaurant.com">noerestaurant.com. >

* Santa Monica has a new bakery, Grateful Bread. Chocolate croissants and orange poppy seed muffins are among the morning offerings. Lunch menu includes daily soups, salads and sandwiches such as rosemary chicken on boules.

Grateful Bread, 1518 Montana Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 394-7178, gratefulbread.org.http://gratefulbread.org">gratefulbread.org. >

* Bin 8945 is offering a five-course "pre-sundown dinner." The menu, which changes weekly, is offered from 6 to 7 p.m. Wednesdays and Sundays for \$45, additional \$25 with wine.

Bin 8945 Wine Bar and Bistro, 8945 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood, (310) 550-8945, bin8945.com.http://bin8945.com">bin8945.com. >

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