



Simple joys are where the best memories are made. As our world opens back up, we pledge not to take the little things for granted. Home has become our anchor, no longer just a place to store our stuff when we're other places. If there is a gift to be taken from the past year, let it be that living a simpler life, beautifully, is worth preserving.

Reaching out to others is worth preserving, too. Big gestures are wonderful, but so are tiny ones. A plate of cookies shared with a neighbor or cocktails on the porch, yes, but also making sure to help our community. Donate your time, your money, shoes you no longer wear, clothes your kids have outgrown.

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Vegan for all

Chef Danny Bowien rose to fame mashing together the restaurant industry's classical foundation, sweat and tears with the idea that fine — or at least interesting — dining could be for everyone. He's a partner in the award-winning Mission Chinese restaurants in San Francisco and New York City and has collaborated with David Chang, Emeril Lagasse and the late Anthony Bourdain.

Bowien is also Korean by birth and Oklahoman by family, born in 1982 in Seoul and raised by adoptive parents in Oklahoma City. He didn't try Korean food in earnest until age 19 and didn't start cooking it until much later. His new cookbook, "Mission Vegan: Wildly Delicious Food for Everyone," reflects that discovery and is a snapshot of Bowien's food today: less ego and less meat but just as much flavor.

I talked to Bowien about food memories, being from somewhere you aren't from, people-pleasing from the liminal space between foreign and familiar and, as the book's title asserts, why vegan food is for everyone.

Interview by Becky Carman
Illustrations by Abbie Sears

What are some of your essential Oklahoma food memories from childhood?

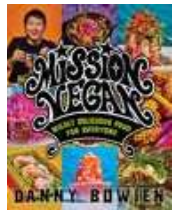
Danny Bowien: When I come back home, I always go to Braum's, and I really do love Tex-Mex. Del Rancho is a really big one for me. If I'm just picking foods, I would have to say Braum's, Vietnamese food, Mexican food, a chicken-fried something at Del Rancho and barbecue.

You talk about existing in this place between Korean and Oklahoman in the book when you discuss eating Korean food for the first time at age 19. How did you grow up answering the question, "Where are you from?"

Bowien: When I was a kid, not only did people ask where I'm from, but they also asked why my parents were white and I was Korean. You kind of answer these things, not necessarily in a defective



Photos provided by Henry Hangreaves



"Mission Vegan: Wildly Delicious Food for Everyone" will be available Aug. 23 in hardback and e-book via Ecco Press.

THE OLDER I GET AND THE MORE I COOK, THE MORE I WANT TO LEARN.

manner, but to give them the information all at once so they don't have more questions: "I'm Korean. I grew up in Oklahoma. I was born in Seoul, but I've lived here my whole life. My parents are American. I was adopted." The instinct is to give someone an answer they want to hear without thinking about your own needs.

Professionally, you've made Japanese, Italian and Chinese food. When you started cooking Korean food, did it feel different? Did you have some sense of responsibility to the cuisine that you hadn't felt before?

Bowien: The first box I had to check was making sure that I really understood the principles of what Korean food is, the pillars of this cuisine. Of course I fantasize like, what if I grew up eating this? This is my food. This is what I should have been

eating growing up. So just making sure there's a lot of attention to detail paid to the foundation, then expanding on that.

When you see a vegan cookbook, you rarely see the word "everyone" with it. What is food for everyone? Who is everyone?

Bowien: That's a good question. Early in my cooking career I was opposed, as I think most egotistical young cooks are, to altering a recipe because my vision might not be seen through. I was really averse to changing something and catering to a certain demographic, but I realized early on that alienates people. We didn't want to be exclusive, and a lot of our clientele was vegetarian or had dietary restrictions. We started to be like, "Okay, well, what can we make? We should just be able to make most of the menu vegan." A lot of my friends that don't eat meat or dairy were kind of used to hearing "no," and it was a very fulfilling feeling to be able to do that.

The book was a challenge for myself to not lean on animal proteins or dairy. That's how I was trained, to cook with those ingredients specifically. I'm not vegan, but you don't have to be vegan to eat or cook vegan. I guess it's a place of just wanting to say, "Yes." We wanted to make something that anyone can pick up and cook from, or maybe learn something from or [use to] make food for anyone. For everyone.

Why did this feel like the right time in your arc as a chef for another book?

Bowien: In a selfish way, writing a book memorializes a place and a time. The older I get and the more I cook, the more I want to learn, and this was exciting, taking away a lot of the training wheels and not making a book using restaurant recipes because we've done that.

It was also wanting to make a resource that doesn't exist. There are a lot of great vegan cookbooks, so what can I offer, if anything, to the conversation? And that's leaning towards Korean food ... my food. That's an interesting place, because growing up in Oklahoma I didn't feel like I was from Oklahoma. And when I go to Korea I look Korean but don't speak



**RECIPE EXCERPT
PASTA POMODORO**

I make this sauce once a week, at least. When it came time to write down the recipe, I only came up with four ingredients, and I was sure I was forgetting something. Nope. It's that simple and comes together quickly — garlic and basil briefly fried in olive oil, top-quality canned tomatoes just brought to a simmer — not for convenience but because that's how it keeps its vibrancy.

Note: To find great San Marzano canned tomatoes, look for the "DOP" on the label, which means they are what they claim to be. I use the La Carmela brand when I can, though there are lots of good ones out there.

- kosher salt
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for finishing
- 1 garlic clove, smashed and peeled
- 12 or so Italian basil leaves, plus another 12 or so for finishing
- One 28-ounce can whole San Marzano (DOP) tomatoes
- 2 pounds fresh semolina noodles, or 26 ounces dried fettuccine

1. Bring a large pot of salty water to a boil.
2. Meanwhile, combine the oil and garlic in a large skillet, set it over medium-high heat, and let it start to sizzle. Tilt the skillet away from you, so the garlic fries over the heat in the oil that pools at the edge, and cook until golden brown, 30 seconds to 1 minute. Over medium-high heat again, stir in the basil and cook until it's almost crispy, 10 to 20 seconds.
3. Turn off the heat (this will help avoid splattering), add the tomatoes and 2 teaspoons salt, then turn the heat back to medium. Let the mixture come to a full simmer, stirring and breaking up the tomatoes, though I like it pretty chunky. Take it off the heat and season with salt.
4. Cook the noodles in the boiling water until fully cooked but still nice and chewy, 2 to 4 minutes. Drain the noodles well, then add them to the skillet with the sauce and toss well.
5. Serve in bowls with the rest of the basil and a drizzle of oil.

Korean, so I get the same questions there as I do here. I never claim to be an expert. That's the biggest point I want to get across. There's always more you can learn, so it was just taking that sensibility and asking, "What book makes sense to me now?" This is what made sense to me now.

I went to Korea earlier this year with my mom who is an old-school, traditional Korean cook, and we learned a lot about newer Korean food, like smoked sausages with rice cakes or melting cheese on everything.

Bowien: The cool thing about Korean food is the evolution, that there is a playfulness, and I think that goes hand in hand with the book. There's obviously reverence towards what got us here, but not everything has to be hyper-traditional or authentic. That authenticity isn't necessarily at the center of what tastes good or makes you happy.

You brought up the word authenticity, which is so complicated in food media. Can you think of any food that is perfect as-is? Any food or dish where you've been like, this is the one thing that's untouchable?

Bowien: Yeah. I think a lot of times, you find yourself trying to change something and end up back to what it originally was, like pasta with tomato sauce. That's in the book, pasta pomodoro. You can add other stuff to that, and it's fine, but at the end of the day, you can just leave it alone. I can add squash blossoms to that or whatever, like I can make it cheffy, and (that's) great, but the foundation of it should be what it has been for the last bazillion years. **CC**

Editor's note: This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Becky Carman is a longtime writer, among other things, based out of Tulsa. She loves food and her dog, who is named after food. On most days, you can find Becky indoors.

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