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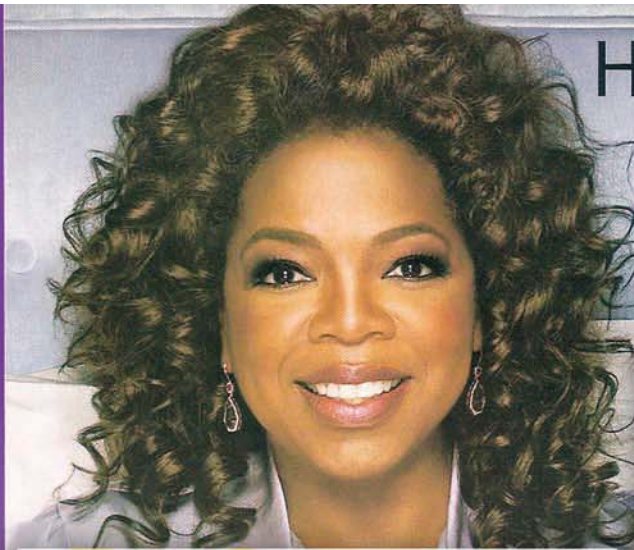
THE OPRAH  
MAGAZINE

LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

## HAPPY ENDINGS

Ring in the New Year with one of chef Pichet Ong's light-as-air desserts. His health-conscious, Asian-inspired showstoppers (the tang and lusciousness of the fruit come alive in your mouth) won't leave you feeling heavy or stuffed but instead refreshed, revived, wowed. **CARA BIRNBAUM** pulls up a seat. ▶

Photographs by  
SANG AN



PICHET ONG TAKES SWEETS SERIOUSLY. THE 40-YEAR-OLD pastry chef starts every day with chocolate, stirring crumbled hunks of Valrhona or Cluizel into his morning coffee. But it's his vision for the end of the meal that's really revolutionary: Make flavor and texture the star players, Ong proposes, and let butter, cream, and sugar take the bit parts. "The purpose of dessert is to clean the palate so that you feel refreshed," he says. It's an idea that sounds especially enlightened during this season of casseroles, pot roasts, and au gratin everything.

Ong grew up in Thailand, Singapore, and Hong Kong. By age 7, he was so adept in the kitchen that his mother asked him to help with the family's holiday baking. He recalls brushing pineapple-filled cookies with an egg-yolk glaze, which crackled in the oven like tangerine skin. At age 16, Ong moved to the United States and eventually earned his master's degree in architectural design, but he spent all his downtime cooking. His first stint in a professional kitchen was as pastry chef at La Folie, in San Francisco. That was followed by jobs at Olives in Boston and Tabla in New York. Before long, the self-taught pastry chef was overseeing dessert menus for Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

Refreshing rather than cloying, Asian pears poached in dry white wine, allspice berries, fresh ginger, and black tea become an elegant finale to any meal.

Last year Ong opened P\*ong, his own restaurant. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 200]

### HOW NOT TO LOOK OLD

25 things never to we

IF YOU'VE  
GAINED BAC  
EVERY BOUN



Melted chocolate, chopped pistachios, and dried cherries transform a slice of bûche into a dessert croissant that's every bit as satisfying as a thick slice of cake.



"I'm inspired by traditional desserts, but I love to reinterpret them," says Ong.

## DESSERTS SHOULD BE ENTERTAINING—

they should evoke fun and amusement. People should look at them and just *feel* happy."