

CONTACT:
Megan Vidulich, Hyperion
917-661-2055/megan.g.vidulich@abc.com

NEWS FROM
voice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Written in the tradition of two classic but different memoirs, Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Julie Powell’s *Julie & Julia*, [Cheryl Tan’s] book is a recipe in itself—a dash of conjuring the ancient stories of one’s past, a sprinkling of culinary narrative. The result is **a literary treat. . . . A delightful take on the relationship between food, family and tradition.**”
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“**Her prose is breezy**, and her descriptions of duck soup and pineapple tarts entice. But the meat of this memoir is what Tan learns about her resilient family, whose members come together both to cook and to heal.”
—*People Magazine*,
a Three-Star Review

“Humorous and heartfelt . . . this **warm, witty chronicle of growing up and finding one’s place between cultures** will be widely enjoyed.”
—*Library Journal*

A TIGER IN THE KITCHEN

A Memoir of Food and Family

By Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan



Cheryl Tan’s first book, **A TIGER IN THE KITCHEN** (February 8, 2011; **Trade Paperback Original; \$14.99**), is delicious proof that it’s never too late to go home again. Her account of coming to terms with her dual cultural identity by spending a year cooking with her female relatives will resonate with anyone who still longs for a favorite childhood meal.

Born in the Year of the Tiger—considered unlucky for girls since Tigers’ headstrong qualities can scare off suitors—Tan was raised in Singapore by parents who allowed her to avoid traditionally “womanly” skills in favor of learning about the wider world, and how to conquer it. As a result, even though she grew up in the world’s most food-obsessed city, she never learned how to cook. Tan moved to the U.S. for college and stayed to pursue her journalism career. By the time she reached her mid-thirties, she was writing for the *Wall Street Journal*. She realized, however, that the professional success she’d dreamed about as a child did not compensate for losing touch with her family culture.

To reestablish contact with this missing part of herself, Tan journeyed to Singapore to spend a year learning to cook the recipes she had taken for granted as a child. During the hours in her aunties’ kitchens, she learned more than just recipes and techniques; she discovered hidden truths about her family and about herself that she would never otherwise have discovered. During this process, Tan found that she was finally letting the women of her family teach her to be a woman—but she was doing it entirely on her own terms. As Jennifer 8. Lee, author of *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*, notes: “Tan’s delectable education through the landscape of Singaporean cuisine teaches us that food is the tie that binds.”

Here are a few of the topics Cheryl can discuss:

- Chinese New Year, an annual 15-day celebration that begins on February 3 this year: Cheryl can explain why it is the most important holiday in Chinese culture, how it is celebrated, and what food traditions are associated with it
- Why cooking is a popular and effective way to explore family heritage—whether you’re Italian, Texan, or Singaporean
- What is Singaporean cuisine—and why is it difficult to find outside of Singapore?
- Why Calvin Trillin described Singaporeans as the most culinarily homesick people in the world
- Where to eat if you’re planning a trip to Singapore; and where to find Singaporean food in New York City

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan is a New York City-based food and fashion writer whose work has appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *InStyle*, *Marie Claire*, *Every Day with Rachael Ray*, *Family Circle*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post*, and many other outlets. She is a regular contributor to the Atlantic Food Channel. Born and raised in Singapore, Tan graduated from Northwestern University and completed two residencies at Yaddo, the artists’ colony. *A Tiger in the Kitchen* is her first book. Follow her at: twitter.com/cherlytan88.

A TIGER IN THE KITCHEN

A Memoir of Food and Family

Published by Voice on February 8, 2011

Trade Paperback Original; Price: \$14.99

ISBN: 978-1-4013-4128-2

Also available as a Hyperion eBook

Reading Group Guide available at www.HyperionBooks.com

To request a review copy or an interview with Cheryl Tan, please contact:

Megan Vidulich, Hyperion and Voice, 917-661-2055 / megan.g.vidulich@abc.com

Follow us: twitter.com/HyperionVoice / Friend us: facebook.com/HyperionVoice

PRAISE FOR *A TIGER IN THE KITCHEN*
BY CHERYL LU-LIEN TAN

“Her prose is breezy, and her descriptions of duck soup and pineapple tarts entice. But **the meat in this memoir is what Tan learns about her resilient family, whose members come together both to cook and to heal.**”

—*People Magazine, a Three-Star Review*

“...this **warm, witty** chronicle of growing up and finding one's place between cultures will be widely enjoyed. Recommended.”

—*Library Journal*

“A **delightful take on the relationship between food, family and tradition.**”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Tan's tiger qualities reveal themselves in her fierce determination to draw her past into her present, to slow down, to learn how to make the food of her childhood.”

—*LA Times*

“With her tiger teeth intact, Tan entered a year of cooking fearlessly and emerged a person with newfound knowledge and a roaring confidence for tackling things in and out of the kitchen.”

—*The Houston Chronicle*

“Chronicling her quest for self-discovery through food, Tan's *A Tiger in the Kitchen* is reminiscent of Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*, yet the author's determination to master her grandmothers' and aunts' recipes also echoes the triumphs and struggles in Julie Powell's *Julie & Julia*.”

—*The Daily Beast*

“Intergenerational dynamics, cultural misunderstandings and culinary blunders all contribute to the story, but the book's focus rarely shifts from the food itself. **Tan's simple, loving descriptions of traditional dishes make the mouth water -- luckily, 10 of her family's recipes are included at the book's end.**”

—*The Oregonian*

“Cheryl Tan, a Tiger in the Kitchen, keeps coming back to Singapore in pursuit of the haunting flavors of childhood meals and finds a part of herself she didn’t know existed in the kitchens of her loving aunties.”

—Gael Greene, *InsatiableCritic.com*

“Starting with charred fried rice and ending with flaky pineapple tarts, Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan takes us along on a personal journey that most can only fantasize about—an exploration of family history and culture through a mastery of home-cooked dishes. Tan’s delectable education through the landscape of Singaporean cuisine teaches us that food is the tie that binds.”

—Jennifer 8. Lee, author of *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*

“How does an NYC fashion journalist find herself in Singapore tackling 3000 pineapple tarts, rice dumplings, and other Teochew dishes? Along with the author, we discover the secrets of a culture through the language of the kitchen in this ultimate cure for culinary homesickness.”

—Kim Sunée, author of *Trail of Crumbs*

After growing up in Singapore, the most food-obsessed city in the world, Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan left home and family at eighteen for America—proof of the rebelliousness of daughters born in the Year of the Tiger. But as a thirtysomething fashion writer in New York, she felt the dishes that defined her childhood calling her back. Was it too late to learn the secrets of her grandmothers’ and aunties’ kitchens? In her quest to recreate the dishes of Singapore by cooking with her female relatives, Tan learned not only cherished recipes but long-buried family stories.

A Tiger in the Kitchen, which includes ten recipes for Singaporean classics such as pineapple tarts and Teochew braised duck, is the charming story of a Chinese-Singaporean ex-pat who learns to infuse her New York lifestyle with rich kitchen lessons that reconnect her with her family and herself.



CHERYL LU-LIEN TAN is a New York-based writer whose work has appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and *InStyle* magazine, among many other publications.

READING GROUP GUIDE AVAILABLE ONLINE

COVER DESIGN BY LAURA KLYNSTRA
COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY RICARDO DEMUREZ / ARCANGEL IMAGES
AUTHOR PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN SEARLES

Also available as a Hyperion eBook

www.HyperionBooks.com
www.cheryllulientan.com

voice
www.EveryWomansVoice.com

A Voice Trade Paperback Original

MEMOIR

ISBN 978-1-4013-4128-2



U.S. \$14.99

A TIGER *in the* KITCHEN
A MEMOIR OF FOOD AND FAMILY

CHERYL
LU-LIEN TAN

“In Cheryl Tan’s story, we see our own families—and our memories of the meals that help define who we are.”
—Jeffrey Zaslow, coauthor of *The Last Lecture*

A TIGER *in the* KITCHEN

A MEMOIR OF FOOD
AND FAMILY

voice C H E R Y L L U - L I E N T A N



AUTHOR PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN SEARLES

C H E R Y L L U - L I E N T A N

is a New York–based writer who has covered fashion, retail, and home design (and written the occasional food story) for the *Wall Street Journal*. Before that she was the senior fashion writer for *InStyle* magazine and the senior arts writer for the *Baltimore Sun*. Born and raised in Singapore, she studied journalism at Northwestern University. Her work has appeared in the *New York Times* and *Marie Claire*, among many other publications. You can follow her travels and eating adventures at www.cheryllulientan.com.

A Conversation with
Cheryl Lu-Lien Tan
author of
TIGER IN THE KITCHEN
A Memoir of Food and Family

Published by Voice on February 8, 2011

Q: What is your book about?

A: *A Tiger In The Kitchen* is the story of the year I spent traveling between New York City, where I live, and Singapore, where I grew up, to search for my identity by cooking with the women of my family. It is a coming of age story in some ways. I spent so much of my life so focused on my career that I neglected to pay attention to some very key lessons that the women in my family had been wanting to teach me. The book is about my search for a deeper, richer sense of self and family. I finally went home to learn about being a “woman,” but on my own, modern terms.

Q: Why did you title the book *A Tiger in the Kitchen*?

A: I was born in the year of the Tiger which, in Chinese families, is not regarded as a good thing for girls. Tigers are supposed to be headstrong and dynamic, qualities reputed to scare off suitors. In fact, my Tiger qualities of being driven and ferocious have come in handy in my career, and I was determined to use them in my quest to learn about my family through cooking as well.

Q: Why is cooking the medium you chose to explore your identity and your family?

A: The seed for this book was planted in Singapore one Chinese New Year when I found myself learning how to make the pineapple tarts that my paternal grandmother had been famous for making to celebrate that holiday. These buttery cookies topped with sweet pineapple jam were my favorite dessert as a child in Singapore. I always thought I would learn how to make them with my grandmother’s guidance, but she died when I was eleven.

Living in the United States as an adult, I missed my family’s cooking and my grandmother’s tarts more with each passing year. When I decided to go home to learn how to make the tarts and other Singaporean dishes, I realized I was also learning about my family and myself. I came to regard this book as a form of culinary anthropology. Many of the dishes I learned are ones that home cooks make without thinking to write down the recipes to pass down to future generations. If I hadn’t learned how to make them, these family recipes may have been lost.

Q: Calvin Trillin famously wrote that Singaporeans are, culinarily, the world's most homesick expats. What is Singaporean food, and why is it so difficult to find outside of Singapore?

A: Singaporeans always say we don't eat to live, we live to eat. The food in Singapore is amazing—diverse and complex and, unfortunately, often difficult to replicate in home kitchens. It's a fusion cuisine that began in the early 19th century when British, Indian, Malay and Chinese traders began flocking to Singapore. Over time, the flavors of the different cultures meshed in the kitchen, giving rise to unique dishes that are hard to find in other parts of the world. Chili crab, for example, combines the abundance of local seafood with spicy flavors. In Singapore, you'll find Chinese, Indian, Malay and even Eurasian curries side by side, each slightly different because of its origins. A popular Eurasian dish around Christmastime is *debal*, or Devil's Curry, which turns Christmas leftovers such as ham, potatoes and turkey into a Southeast Asian curry.

Q: What did you learn in your year of cooking in Singapore?

A: I learned recipes and kitchen skills, yes, but also family stories that I might never have heard outside the kitchen setting. I had heard some family stories before, but some of the details I learned in the kitchen were startling. My great-grandfather, whom I'd been brought up to believe was the model of goodness and ambition, had been an opium addict who used his granddaughter as a drug courier, for example. And I was surprised to hear just how cruel my grandfather, a gambler and womanizer, had been to his family and how dearly he paid for that in his waning years.

Other stories my aunts and grandmother told me opened my eyes to their fortitude in dealing with trying situations they encountered in their lives. Hearing about their bravery allowed me to get to know them on a different level. Their bravery taught me a lot about how I want to live my own life. Above all, I learned about courage and embracing adventure; being unafraid to tackle new things and new experiences inside the kitchen and out.

Q: Your father is a compelling figure in your book. In some ways, it seems that he raised you to be the son he never had, but in other ways, his views seem very traditional. How have his expectations shaped you?

A: I would not be the person I am without my father. He always treated me as an adult, even when I was a child, and always encouraged me to believe that I could aspire to anything, that if I worked hard enough, the possibilities were limitless. He never once told me that I should learn how to cook in order to be a good wife; in fact, he has always told me "work comes first." He wanted me to be fulfilled in my career. Getting married was good and all, but that could always come later.

Q: You indicate that Singaporean women are traditionally excellent cooks, yet your mother is not. Can you talk a bit about how your mother's choices influenced yours?

A: My mother, who is now in her mid-50s, is of the generation of Singaporean women who were the first to unshackle themselves from the boundaries that limited the women before them. Cooking and getting stuck in a traditional women's role in the kitchen were powerful symbols of the old ways, hence it was something that she avoided, preferring to spend her time on her career and herself instead. Her headstrong nature and her rebellion in those still rather conventional times greatly influenced me. I always saw her as a woman who embraced her power and was unafraid to push the envelope. My mother's choices have been very inspiring for me.

Q: What are the differences you've experienced between life as a woman in Singapore and life as a woman in the United States?

A: Although Singapore is an incredibly modern city-state, it's also very traditional in some ways. The work environment may have changed in recent years, but as a child and teenager there, I was always aware that there might be a glass ceiling for me should I pursue a journalism career in Singapore. I once had a Singaporean mentor, whom I had kept apprised of my journalism career in the United States, tell me that he was very proud of my growing accomplishments but "Sometimes I think you're trying too hard to be like a man." In the United States, there are fewer limitations for women. I was inspired from my years in college onward by the female role models I saw in journalism, including high-ranking editors and publishers.

Q: Everyone who writes about Singaporean food mentions hawker centers. What is a hawker center?

A: A hawker center is basically an outdoor food court that features vendors selling a range of dishes: Malay curries, Chinese porridge, turtle soup, Indian *satay*, and even Western dishes such as fries and pork chops. Each vendor tends to sell just one kind of dish, and some of them become so famous for that one dish that Singaporeans travel from all parts of the country in order to eat it. Food at hawker centers is incredibly inexpensive: most dishes cost about U.S. \$2.

Q: What is the Festival of the Hungry Ghosts?

A: The Festival of the Hungry Ghosts is the month of the Chinese lunar calendar in which the Gates of Hell are opened and spirits are allowed to roam the earth. Superstitious Chinese believe that during this month you have to feed the ghosts by placing elaborate food offerings outside your house. If you don't appease them and quell their hunger, ghosts will run amok and toy with people's lives and health. During this month you'll often see platters of food and fruit displayed on roadsides or outside homes. Neighborhood associations will sometimes hire Chinese opera troupes to stage outdoor performances to entertain the ghosts and keep them from bothering humans.

My Auntie Khar Imm usually makes *beng kway* as an offering to my dead relatives and other ghosts at this time. *Beng kway* is a savory dish made by frying rice, chopped mushrooms, garlic, shallots and boiled peanuts together and then wrapping that in a pink dough to form a teardrop-

shaped flat cake. The dough has to be dyed pink for good luck; if it's white, it's the color of death, which could be terrible for you when the Hungry Ghosts are out. You steam that cake and eat it with chili sauce for breakfast or lunch. It's the ultimate comfort food. I ate *beng kway* while I was growing up but never even thought of making it. I was grateful to be able to learn it when I returned as an adult.

Q: What's an ideal day of eating for you when you're in Singapore?

A: An ideal day for me in Singapore involves at least five meals. I often start my day with two breakfasts. I love to have *ta mee pok*, a tagliatelle-like noodle that's tossed in a spicy sauce with fishballs, slices of fishcake, bite-sized strips of pork, shrimp, and crunchy cubes of deep-fried pork lard. This dish is a Teochew classic (the Teochews being the Chinese ethnic group of which I'm a part). I'll chase it with a mid-morning snack of *roti prata*, an Indian flat bread served with a side of curry for dipping. You can get several versions of *roti prata*—some new Yuppified versions come with cheese or banana fillings—but my go-to is a “plaster,” which is a *prata* with a fried egg plastered on top.

For lunch, dinner and supper, I like to hit some of my favorite Singaporean dishes. *Hokkien mee* is a Chinese fried noodle dish that involves frying three different kinds of noodles together with squid and shrimp. I adore *nasi padang*, which is a Malay “rice table.” The display case at a *nasi padang* stall will have a variety of dishes such as *ayam masak merah*—a fried chicken swimming in a spicy red gravy that has been sweetened with *gula melaka*, a Southeast Asian palm sugar—and *beef rendang*, where the meat has been braised to incredible tenderness in a heady mix of coconut milk, lemongrass, blue ginger and a melange of spices. At a *nasi padang* stall, you point at the dishes you want to sample and they pile everything onto a plate of rice for you to dig into. Truly delicious.

I also have a deep love for *satay*, especially Hainanese satay, which is rare in the United States. The *satay* created by the Chinese people from Hainan Island, China, is made of very fatty pork that's been grilled to charred perfection. You dip the skewers into a spicy peanut sauce that's laced with pureed fresh pineapple so you have a complex and lovely combination of spicy and sweet coating your charred meat—again, truly delicious.

Q: And what's your ideal day of eating when you're home in New York?

A: My ideal day of eating in New York begins with either a breakfast of fried chicken and pancakes (the original Pink Teacup used to be my go-to) or a trip to Hope & Anchor in Red Hook, where the jerk chicken hash and eggs is to die for. For the rest of the day, I have so many places I adore in New York. I feel so lucky to live somewhere where I can easily get Cambodian sandwiches (Num Pang) and Vietnamese pho as well as outstanding pizza (Roberta's). I have a great love for burgers (Shake Shack, Corner Bistro—I love it when the patty is so tender the burger's juices are all over my hands), steaks (Strip House), and simple but well-made pastas (Noodle Pudding in Brooklyn is outstanding). But when I get homesick for food, which is often, and I don't feel like cooking, I like Taste Good in Queens and Nyonya in Chinatown. And, of course, I always return to Cafe Asean in the West Village.

Q: Do you think your American and Singaporean friends will react differently to the book?

A: I have always felt that I've led a dual life in the 17 years that I've lived in the United States; in America, I act very American, which translates into modern, liberal-minded, unafraid to speak my mind, while in Singapore, I have to tone things down a little sometimes, be more mindful and respectful of my elders both in speech and manner. So I suppose my American friends might be fascinated by the different side of me that emerges in the Singapore sections of the book while my Singaporean friends may find it interesting to see my "Western" side. Above all, I hope all my friends see that my identity is a dual one: I'm not just Singaporean, I'm not just American; I will always be both.

Q: What message do you hope your readers take from reading *A Tiger in the Kitchen*?

A: I hope my readers come away with the realization that it's important to slow your life down and focus on the things that matter. My experience shows that food can be the universal connector that brings loved ones together. So often we're so busy and focused on our jobs that we forget to celebrate the everyday, whether it's sitting down to a meal with a loved one or sharing time in the kitchen in order to put that meal on the table. Too much of life whizzes by without essential moments like that. I feel fortunate that I had a year to concentrate on these moments with my family. Above all, I hope *A Tiger in the Kitchen* shows that anything is possible if you set your mind to it, whether it's crossing the world to seek a better life, learning how to cook, or, simply, taking a break to discover yourself.

To arrange an interview with Cheryl Tan, please contact:

Allison McGeehon, Hyperion Books, 917-661-2054/allison.mcgeehon@abc.com

