

Seattle "neighbors" talk about their favorite "Cool Tools"

Judith van Praag

A journalist, a caregiver for the elderly, a fashion model, a veterinarian, a bank, and a voice actor/ narrator—all of them neighbors of Kate Klippensteen—lend their "saibashi" or cooking chopsticks to the author of "Cool Tools", to model for her partner, the photographer Yasuo Konishi. Presented in a line-up, each set shows character. But it's the assembly of "yukihira-nabe", pots with high-angled handles, which perhaps says more about the users. Some of the pots are scoured clean, and fire has blackened others. Most of the wooden handles are discolored, possibly a sign of being the cook's favorite.

Two "neighbors" in Seattle, local artist Etsuko Ichikawa, and Pacific Reader editor Patti Yano were willing to share their favorite kitchen utensils and salivating triggers with International Examiner readers.

Etsuko swears by using a Solingen knife for all-purpose cutting. Patti's favorite is a Mac, and she uses a Japanese whetstone to sharpen all of her knives.

Neither of them uses a "goma-iri" to toast sesame seeds. Patti uses a small cast iron pan, and Etsuko almost never does any toasting since she moved from Japan. "I wish I had a goma-iri here... it smells so good!" she said.

Both women grind their own sesame seeds and own a "surbashi" and "kogi" (mortar and pestle) Patti also has a Western style set, which she uses for other preparations.

Patti gets lyrical when she talks about fresh "wasabi".
"It sends out a memory retrieval that activates my salivary glands."

Etsuko's parents live in Nagano. "There's a wasabi field there, so when I go home, I definitely take advantage using fresh wasabi for 'soba'."

Reading "Cool Tools" brought back memories of my own first experience with Japanese food, some 25 years ago, and it wasn't sushi that came to mind, but the yin and yang of macrobiotic cuisine. Back then I was puzzled by the hardness of the smoked and dried skipjack tuna, wondering how to grate the fish, unaware of the existence of a "katsuo kezuriki, the typical bonito plane.

Patti's plane and bonito were from her grandfather's hometown in Japan, an area known for the great variety of available fish. Etsuko is still looking for a bonito plane in Seattle, and hopes to find out where she can find one.

Etsuko as well as Patti use both American and Japanese-style pots such as "donabe" and "sukiyaki-nabe", Patti uses hers for "nabemono" and tea. Neither owns a "yukihira-nabe" with the high angled handle.

Asked about Japanese strainers, Etsuko said: "For some reason I have many. Most are 'zaru' in different sizes and shapes. One that I really like is a very tiny one with a handle -it's especially designed for melting and straining miso for miso soup."

Patti's number one favorite tool is a Japanese mandolin (shredder). "I have the tool ("yasai nukigata") that punches shapes, and a scrubber, but the mandolin is heads above the rest. The second one I would consider is for shredding ginger. I would like to have that plastic thing that one can use to make "tsukemono".

Etsuko's favorites are: "A tablespoon-size metal strainer for picking up tofu from 'nabe', a lime squeezer, a daikon "kezuri-ki" (grater), small plates with ginger grinder, long chopsticks, garlic peeler, cast iron pan for tako-yaki. And maybe more..."

My favorite utensil is a wooden spoon, worn out on one side from right hand stirring; a reliable pan is an old cast-iron hand-me-down, good for toasting, sautéing, and frying. I start each day filling my tiny Revere Ware teakettle.

What are your kitchen favorites?

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