

# Stretching an Instant Legacy

Text and Illustration by MARTIN ENRIQUE H. OROSA

When Momofuku Ando invented the world's first instant noodles in the 1950s, his main purpose was to help ease the food shortage in Japan during the post-war era. Decades after, his simple wish became one of the greatest success stories in noodle history. His creation serves as the basis for the oodles of instant noodle brands found in food stores worldwide, and consistently remains a top food choice for anyone on the go. But now that it is 2008, I wonder; how can we update Ando's phenomenal legacy?

My earliest memory of eating instant noodles was during my grade school days in the 90s. For breakfast, trusty Ate Marlene used to prepare a steaming bowl of either chicken or beef instant noodles for me and my siblings, and she would always throw in scrambled eggs to make it more filling. When I look back at those days, especially after reminiscing childhood memories with my friends, I realize that we weren't the only bunch to enjoy such a satisfying treat. I know of many families who slurped the same scrumptious dish. It's not surprising at all since in my opinion, Filipinos in general always think of ways, even if perceived as unusual, to make the most out of their food. Some even eat their noodles with a large heaping of plain rice! So, if eggs are often put in noodles to give it a tasty boost, why not other ingredients such as herbs, spices and condiments to make it more gourmet?

If you think about it, instant noodles are actually very versatile. The curly pale yellow noodles taste very neutral, almost bland (depending on the brand). Its neutrality allows it to absorb the essence of absolutely anything it is combined with. The soup on the other hand, regardless of its flavor, is a good base for morsels of meat and vegetables to cook in. As it is already pre-seasoned, it readily flavors the meat, and you only need to adjust the amount of salt and pepper to balance the dish. Even in cookbooks, the common flavors used as stocks for soups would either be chicken or beef, making it an ideal base to transform your instant noodles into virtually any cuisine of choice.

Perhaps you are craving Chinese? Go ahead and start splashing a tablespoon or two of sesame oil, soy sauce and vinegar. You'll end up having something similar to Peking hot and sour soup! Adding calamansi or lemon juice with eggs to your chicken noodle soup will give you the traditional Greek avgolemono or egg and lemon soup in English. If you want to have something vegetarian, green leafy vegetables such as cabbage leaves, spinach, or even kangkong are good choices since they will cook quickly in the broth. Going Filipino? Malunggay and some ginger

would give you something comparable to Tinolang Manok. Carrots, green beans, cauliflower, broccoli or blanched green peas can give your soup that added crunch. Alternatively, incorporating tofu as a substitute for meat would further increase the soup's nutritional value and will give it a silky luxurious texture.

The range of combinations to modify Ando's legacy is countless. You can be a chef-for-a-day and play around with herbs and spices. To bring out the natural goodness of chicken, you may want to try aromatic ingredients such as cloves, thyme, rosemary, tarragon, or oregano. On the other hand, fresh bay leaves, parsley, and even basil will give your beef noodle soup added spark. Just remember to go easy on the herbs especially if your family isn't used to having them. Also, chives, leeks, spring onions, and garlic will work well for any soup base, and will give you the pleasant pungency you might be looking for. Lastly, chili powder, cumin or even a dash of your favorite hot sauce gives the spicy kick that will leave you craving for more. As for me, I blend scrambled eggs, a spoon of sesame oil and bits of cooked chicken meat in my noodle soup because I like the Chinese flavor it gives to the dish.

A little effort and imagination is all it really takes to jazz up your regular instant noodles and stretch Ando's instant legacy. You can even have your family members join in on the fun and make it a contest of who can come up with the tastiest dish. Don't worry, there is really no right or wrong choice in whatever you want to include in your noodle soup. If you want it sweet, spicy, thick, thin, or creamy in consistency the only thing that matters is that it tastes delicious to you. Remember that transforming a simple dish such as instant noodles into your very own personalized meal is a success that you should be proud of. So, go ahead and experiment. Have fun, and dare to wake up your inner gourmand!

