

W I L D M A N G O
R E S T A U R A N T A N D B A R

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Jia Wei – Profile

**Owner and Chef, Wild Mango restaurant and bar
North Olmsted, Ohio**

Master chef. Restaurateur. Classical and jazz musician. Artist. Interior designer. Carpenter. Electrician. Pick one, any one, and Jia Wei does it well. But his restaurants—and every detail in them, especially the food—are his passion.

Born in Beijing, China, Jia Wei came to Oberlin College in Ohio to study trumpet in 1990. As a student, he worked part-time at the Mandarin Chinese restaurant in Oberlin to pay his bills. There, he began to feel the stirrings of entrepreneurial desire. As many college students do, Jia began to reexamine what he really wanted to do in life. So, before his senior year at Oberlin, Jia Wei returned to Beijing for a year to sharpen his cooking skills in a hotel restaurant.

When he came back to Oberlin, he and Connie Luu, a friend with restaurant management experience, took over the lease to the Mandarin, spiced up the décor, added live jazz to the great food, and the rest is history. By 1998, they had opened their own restaurant, Weia Teia, in Oberlin, and two years later, another Weia Teia in North Olmsted. In 2004, Weia Teia in North Olmsted became Wild Mango, with a newly renovated lounge and even more extensive menu. The interior, completely designed and mainly built by Jia Wei, is excitement personified. With the name change, he even added his own small, luscious paintings of mangoes to the walls of the intimate curtained booths. And he's just scratched the surface of his passion for food.

As a child, Jia Wei was curious about how things were put together. He was especially interested in the secrets to the delicious and inventive meals his Mother prepared for the family every night, but he says his mother “shooed him out of the kitchen.” However, he still admires the fact that she was always creative, combining new flavors and ingredients to make their family meals exciting. He brings that enthusiasm for perfectly blended flavors to his own cooking. He explains that cooking well is like playing jazz. You take the basic ingredients, add solid skills, and improvise until you have a perfect, pleasing combination. Good food and good music excite the all the senses, he says.

So what kind of food does this multi-talented man cook? Jia Wei prefers to call it “multicultural cuisine with an eclectic twist.” His expertise at harmonizing flavors and cooking styles comes from years of experience and his love of constantly tinkering with recipes, like his mother did, to achieve ever more soul-satisfying results. Jia Wei marries the best of Asian flavors and ingredients with European ideas and cooking techniques and then adds his imaginative, artistic touch to some of the most beautiful food presentations you’ll ever see. Instead of focusing on rigorously enforced rules of cookery, Jia Wei makes inspired flavor, beauty, and excitement his main goal.

Does he succeed? Ask one of his loyal patrons from Beachwood to Avon why they drive all the way to North Olmsted to Wild Mango for dinner. And, as the Zagat Survey[®] said in 2004, “All restaurants should be this good.”