



Back from the lake.

With one last look at summer and the smell of school and smoke already in the air, you all pile into the car to make the long drive home.

But as you get closer to the city, and notice that pale, yellow leaves now decorate the inukshuks perched on the side of the road, you feel yourself letting go of the lake and looking forward to being back.

For, after weeks of waterskiing, shore lunches and campfires, there are plenty of people to catch up with. And as you drive home, you find yourself planning the meal that will bring you all together.

For this, we see no better answer than Thai, a cuisine that seems almost custom-made for in-the-city girlfriend gatherings. The meal we propose starts with celebratory lychee martinis, which should establish the effervescence so important to a night of good gossip. Then it's on to salad rolls, at once chewy, light and surprisingly buttery thanks to chunks of avocado. Soup follows with crunchy shrimp bobbing in a hot, sour, tangy broth. Then comes the spice of green curry and supple pad thai. Airy, refreshing coconut custard closes the meal, though the conversation is still in full swing.

And there is just nothing like that conversation, is there? Perhaps because there was the summer distance, there is now so much to say. And so you say it and find yourself expressing things you perhaps hadn't been able to formulate yet just on your own. But your friends listen and share and eat the food you cooked for them. And as you talk, about marriage and kids, parents and in-laws, books, movies, trips, you all truly listen to each other, ask good questions, get to the heart of the matter, make soft suggestions, share similar stories, laugh.

And you realize how nice it is to be back to city life.

Fresh spring rolls

2 small ripe avocados, peeled, pitted and sliced into wedges
 1 teaspoon sesame oil
 1 teaspoon fresh lime juice
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon coarse salt and $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
 8 (4-inch) rice paper wrappers
 4 butter lettuce leaves, torn in half
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh cilantro leaves
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup julienned carrots
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped green onions

In small bowl, gently combine avocado, sesame oil, lime juice, salt and pepper; set aside.

Cover work surface with damp kitchen towel. In medium bowl of warm water, immerse one rice paper sheet; let soak 15 seconds until soft. Remove and transfer to work surface. Place lettuce leaf on bottom third of wrapper. Place 2 avocado slices on lettuce; top with cilantro, carrots and green onions. Fold in sides then roll tightly into log. Cover with damp cloth. Repeat with remaining wrappers. Serve immediately. Makes 8.



Dipping sauce dish, These Four Walls; Martini glass, The Bay



Soup bowl, The Bay



Lychee martinis

1 ½ cups gin
 3 ounces dry vermouth
 1 can whole lychee nuts in juice
 Lemon balm, to garnish

Combine gin and vermouth in a cocktail shaker with 1 cup ice. Add 6 tablespoons lychee juice from can. Stir gently until cold; strain into chilled cocktail glasses. Garnish with one lychee nut per martini and sprig of lemon balm. Serves 6.

Shrimp in hot and sour broth

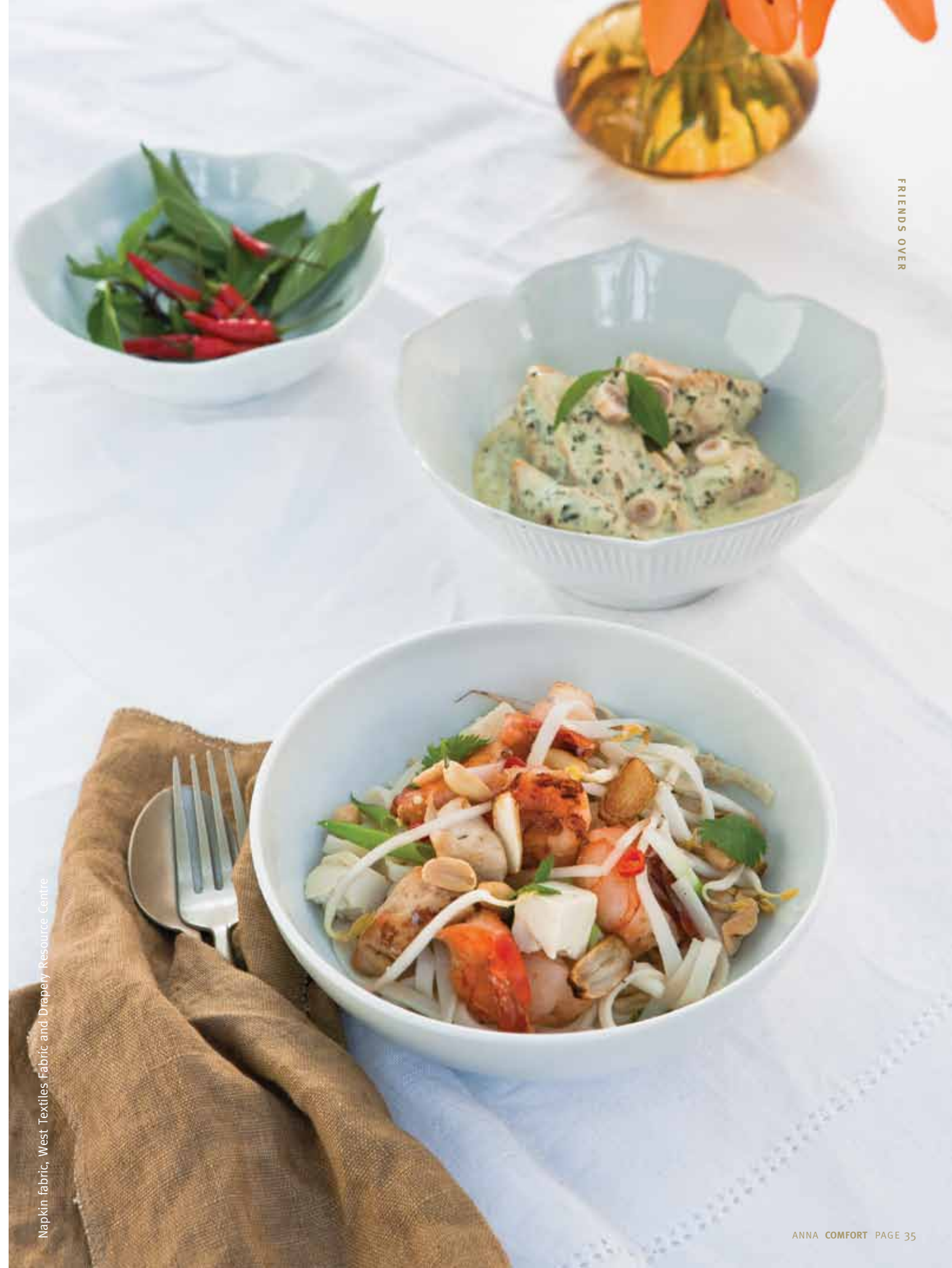
2 stalks lemon grass
 3 cups homemade chicken stock
 5 kaffir lime leaves, soaked in water
 6 bird chiles or Thai chiles, stemmed, halved, seeded and sliced
 5 dried Chinese mushrooms, soaked in boiling water for 10 minutes and sliced
 ½ pound black tiger shrimp, peeled and deveined
 4 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
 2 tablespoons fish sauce
 Fresh cilantro, to garnish

Trim off and discard grassy upper stalks of lemon grass and hard root stumps. Peel off and discard tough outer layer. Flatten stalks with flat side of knife or cleaver, cut stalks into ¼-inch pieces; set aside.

In medium saucepan, bring stock to boil over medium heat. Add lemon grass, kaffir leaves and chiles. Reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Add mushrooms, cook for 5 minutes. Add shrimp and cook for 3 minutes longer. Stir in lemon juice and fish sauce. Serve in shallow bowls. Garnish with cilantro. Serves 6.

Table cloth and pillows, The Bay





Napkin fabric, West Textiles Fabric and Drapery Resource Centre

Green chicken curry

2 tablespoons canola oil
 3 (5-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, sliced
 ½ cup green curry paste (see recipe below)
 1 cup canned coconut milk
 Salt and pepper, to taste
 ½ cup fresh holy basil or Thai basil, chopped

Heat oil in wok over high heat. Add chicken and cook 3 to 4 minutes, or until slightly pink. Add curry paste and cook 2 minutes. Stir in coconut milk and cook 7 to 8 minutes or until sauce thickens. Season with salt and pepper and stir in basil leaves. Serves 6.

Green curry paste

8 small fresh bird chiles or Thai chiles
 1 tablespoon minced frozen galangal
 4 pieces kaffir lime leaves, soaked and chopped
 1 cup fresh holy basil or Thai basil
 2 stalks lemon grass (bottom third only)
 3 cloves garlic, minced
 1 medium onion, finely chopped
 ¼ cup chopped coriander root
 2 tablespoons whole coriander seed
 ½ cup canola oil

Place all ingredients except oil in food processor and pulse to smooth paste, scraping sides of bowl with spatula. Turn on processor and add oil in slow, steady stream. Transfer mixture to glass jar. Mixture can be refrigerated for up to one week. Makes 1 cup.

Pad thai

1 (12-ounce) package medium-thick pad thai noodles, also referred to as Sen Chan noodles
 ¼ cup canola oil, divided
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 ½ pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, thinly sliced
 1 (4-ounce) package firm tofu, drained and cut into ¼-inch dice
 2 eggs, beaten
 ½ cup tamarind juice
 3 tablespoons fish sauce or oyster sauce
 3 tablespoons rice vinegar
 1 tablespoon palm sugar or brown sugar
 1 teaspoon sambal olek or Sriracha sauce
 1 pound large shrimp, shelled and deveined
 ½ cup crushed, salted peanuts
 ½ cup bean sprouts, to garnish
 ½ cup cilantro, to garnish

Bring medium saucepan filled with water to boil. Add noodles and cook 3 to 5 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold water. Toss with 1 tablespoon oil; set aside.

Heat remaining oil in wok over high heat. Add garlic and chicken; cook 2 to 3 minutes until chicken is only slightly pink. Add tofu and cook 1 minute longer. Stir in eggs. Add noodles, tamarind juice, fish sauce, vinegar, sugar and sambal; cook for 3 minutes. Add shrimp and cook 2 to 4 minutes longer. Add peanuts; toss to coat. Remove from heat. Sprinkle with bean sprouts and cilantro. Serves 8.




Vintage knife, Sheilagh Wardrop



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SIP SAVOUR and **SILVER**
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Coconut custard with mango sauce

5 egg yolks
1/3 cup sugar
1 1/2 cups heavy whipping cream
1/2 cup coconut milk
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 cup mango juice
2 teaspoons cornstarch, mixed with 1 teaspoon water

In medium bowl, whisk together egg yolks and sugar until smooth; set aside. In small saucepan, heat cream, coconut milk and vanilla over medium heat for about 3 to 4 minutes. Remove and slowly pour hot cream mixture into egg mixture, whisking constantly to prevent eggs from curdling. Strain mixture through fine-mesh sieve into clean bowl. Cool bowl over ice bath, whisking constantly to prevent film from forming.

Preheat oven to 300°F. Pour custard mixture into 6 ramekins. Place in 13 x 9-inch baking dish and fill dish with 1/2 inch water. Bake for 35 to 45 minutes or until custard jiggles slightly when shaken. Chill 2 hours.

For mango sauce, in small saucepan, add juice and cook over medium heat until reduced by half. Whisk mango juice in cornstarch mixture and cook 2 minutes longer. Spoon sauce over custard. Serves 6.

