

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

National Edition

Colorado: Periods of snow in mountains. Snow and rain showers on Front Range. Mainly rain showers on eastern Plains. Highs in 30's and 40's. Weather map appears on Page C12.

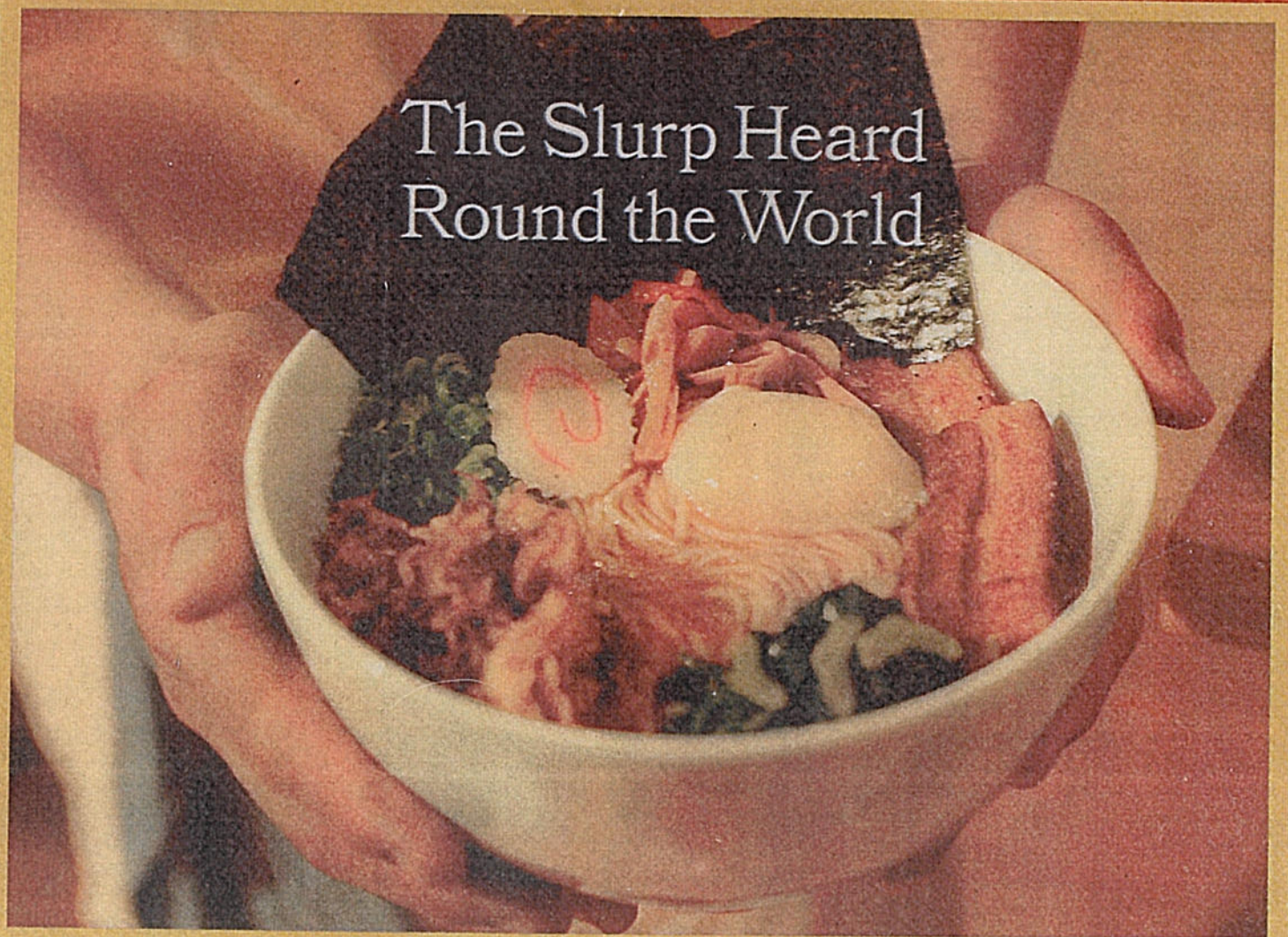
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ONE DOLLAR



The Slurp Heard Round the World

Japan In a Bowl

NEW YORKERS have several choices for sampling Japanese noodles:

CHIKUBU, 12 East 44th Street, (212) 818-0715. Ramen on Fridays and Saturdays.

HONMURA AN, 170 Mercer Street (Houston Street), (212) 334-5253.

MINCA, 536 East Fifth Street; (212) 505-8001.

MOMOFUKU, 163 First Avenue (10th Street); (212) 475-7899.

NOOCH, 143 Eighth Avenue (17th Street); (212) 691-8600.

ONIGASHIMA, 43-45 West 55th Street; (212) 541-7145.

RAI RAI KEN, 214 East 10th Street; (212) 477-7030.

SAPPORO, 152 West 49th Street; (212) 869-8972.

SOBA-YA, 229 East Ninth Street; (212) 533-6966.

SOBA NIPPON, 19 West 52nd Street; (212) 489-2525.

The New York Times - November 10, 2004

Here Comes Ramen, the Slurp Heard Round the World
By JULIA MOSKIN

AS a Tokyo-based jazz musician, Shigeto Kamada used to book gigs for his band in remote towns in Hokkaido (the Japanese equivalent of, say, northern Wisconsin), just so he could taste the ramen there. "I would hear of a place with a special broth or a new topping, and I just had to taste it," Mr. Kamada said.

"Ramen?" you ask. "That plastic-wrapped block of dry noodles and powdered soup?" But freshly made ramen is another thing altogether. In Japanese ramenyas (ramen shops) a bowl of ramen holds a house-made soup, springy noodles, the chef's own tare (a mix of soy sauce, sugar and rice wine to flavor the soup) and exactly six traditional toppings. The wait at top Tokyo ramenyas can be up to three hours.

Remember the 1985 movie "Tampopo," in which a ramen chef undergoes training as rigorous as a boxer's to create the perfect bowl of noodle soup? That's ramen mania.

And with new and authentic ramenyas opening in Manhattan, New Yorkers are getting a taste.

Places like Momofuku, Minca Ramen Factory and Rai Rai Ken in the East Village offer Berkshire pork, free-range chicken and proprietary blends of organic miso paste. In Chelsea the just-opened Nooch, part of a Singapore-based chain, is raising the fabulousness quotient of ramen with Karim Rashid-designed donburis (bowls) and a D. J. booth. Chikubu in Midtown makes its succulent ramen only on Friday and Saturday, but it draws a loyal crowd of regulars. Sapporo, though it has all the charm of an office cubicle, serves the best goma (sesame) ramen in the city.

The difference between these richly satisfying bowls and packaged ramen, flavored mostly with MSG, is vast. "New York might never have really great ramen, just like Tokyo might never have really great pizza," said David Chang, the Korean-American chef, trained at Craft and now the owner of Momofuku. "But I'm having a lot of fun trying."

In Japan ramen is more than a cheap cup of noodles. It is the national dish, cheaper than sushi, available everywhere and perpetually fashionable. With its rich, meaty broth, ramen is very different from other Japanese soups; in fact the dish is a relatively recent import from China. But since ramen became popular in Japan in the 1950's, it has been a national institution: quick, inexpensive street food, as closely associated with young people and budget meals as it is here. One Japanese name for instant ramen is gakusei ryori, or student cuisine. Ramen stalls cluster around train stations, and vending machines provide customized bowls.