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## Peter Meehan



On Peter: [Willard Glasses](#), [Short Sleeve Jasper Shirt](#), [Echo Pocket Tee](#), [Wave Pant](#)

To say that Peter Meehan has influenced the way we think about food is a bit of an understatement. For the past six years, this James Beard Award-winning food writer has helmed the indie food magazine *Lucky Peach* (a collaboration with David Chang of Momofuku), a publication that's pushed the envelope on food journalism and the relationship between chefs and writers – all without taking itself too seriously.

And that's who Peter is, too. He's someone who can pull out old editions of indie mags like *Wet* and the Beastie Boys' *Grand Royal* from his extensive collection, or share his thoughts on the Misono cleaver hanging on his kitchen wall – expertly, yet unpretentiously. And although we met Peter right at the moment when *Lucky Peach* announced that it would be closing its doors, due to creative differences, we still had a chance to chat with him about his creative process. We also learned how to make a classic *Lucky Peach* dish, perfect for a summer dinner party – the Chineasy Cucumber Salad.



**Steven Alan:** So going from the *New York Times* to starting up your own thing – what was the impetus there?

**Peter Meehan:** Well, my work at the Times was freelance, so that was an awesome job but it wasn't like a paying-my-taxes-on-time kind of job, so I left. And that's when I met Dave [Chang]. Momofuku was very exciting at the time, and I just wanted to know how to cook a lot of that food, so we wrote that cookbook, started writing other cookbooks, and then we did a television show that became *Mind of a Chef*.





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**SA:** Is there a certain way you come up with ideas for these different articles and different stories that you're running?

**P:** I come up with a list of ideas and start talking about them, and then we try to find the blandest possible topics in food – like we just did a chicken issue, right? We think about it this way – how do we do a chicken issue that's weird, interesting, and engaging and tells you things you might

not know about chicken? That was an interesting challenge, and so was the issue we're working on now, which is the Suburb issue – which is a terrible idea for a food magazine –

**SA:** – a terrible idea in retrospect or a terrible idea that you thought could be interesting?

**P:** No, it was appealing. I'm from the suburbs; lots of people are from the suburbs. I didn't have Chinese food until I started dating my wife [Hannah Clark], and she started taking me to haze me. It just wasn't what I grew up with. For this edition, we think about what suburbs meant then, what suburbs mean now, but it's a funny thing because smart writer types that I'll talk to will be like, "The suburbs, that's fascinating. But what does that actually mean?" It's a fun puzzle to reach out to writers who are from the suburbs, who live in a city that has a suburb we want to know more about or academics who have written on the subject and trying to figure out how to piece it all together into a food magazine format. So, we take a really boring thing and figure out how to make it interesting, or take a complex subject that's not really literally connected – or usually associated with food – and figure out how to make a food magazine out of that.



**SA:** Do you ever do these things and think about them after like, “Why were we thinking about that? That was actually a bad idea...now we have to make this thing sound interesting.”

**P:** So often. Constantly. The Suburb issue definitely had some moments of that, but then finally has coalesced. You don't really know until it's coming together, until the last couple weeks with the layout, design, and the overall feeling that it's working.

**SA:** Are there any restaurants that you're planning to go to right now, or any new/good ones you've gone to recently?

**P:** Woo's Wonton King is the only place that we've been going to, on the regular, lately because it's fun to have a reliable Cantonese place that we have a relationship with – and they're cool with the kids and bring them dessert. Also, Contra. Wildair is their wine bar, that everyone loves, but because I'm old and I sit and it needs to be quiet, Contra is where I like to go if I'm going to a business dinner. It's totally the joint – their food is incredible and super inventive and their wine is natural and amazing.

**Chineasy Cucumber Salad**

*Makes about 2 servings, easily multiplied.*

1 tablespoon Chinkiang vinegar  
1 teaspoon Sichuan chili oil  
1 teaspoon sesame oil  
1 teaspoon turbinado sugar  
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt  
3 Persian or Kirby cucumbers or 1 English cucumber  
1 teaspoon toasted sesame seeds  
2 tablespoons crushed roasted unsalted peanuts  
2 tablespoons cilantro leaves

1. Whisk together the vinegar, chili oil, sesame oil, sugar, and salt in a medium bowl until the sugar dissolves. Set the dressing aside.

2. Halve the cucumbers lengthwise. (If using English cucumbers, remove the seeds with a small spoon and discard.) Set them cut-side down on a cutting board and lightly smash them: Give them a couple angry thwaps with the side of a cleaver (or a large chef's knife) until the cucumbers

crack in a few places. (For less drama, just press down on them with the side of the knife.) Cut the abused cucumbers crosswise into 3/4-inch-thick half-moons.

3. Toss the cucumbers in the dressing, portion them out onto plates, and top each serving with sesame seeds, peanuts, and cilantro.

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