

Navigating the International Stores

Packed to the rafters with the fresh, different, and not-labeled-in-English, international stores are a treasure trove of multinational flavors — made easier with an expert guide.

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PHOTOS BY JULI ECK



Our Expert

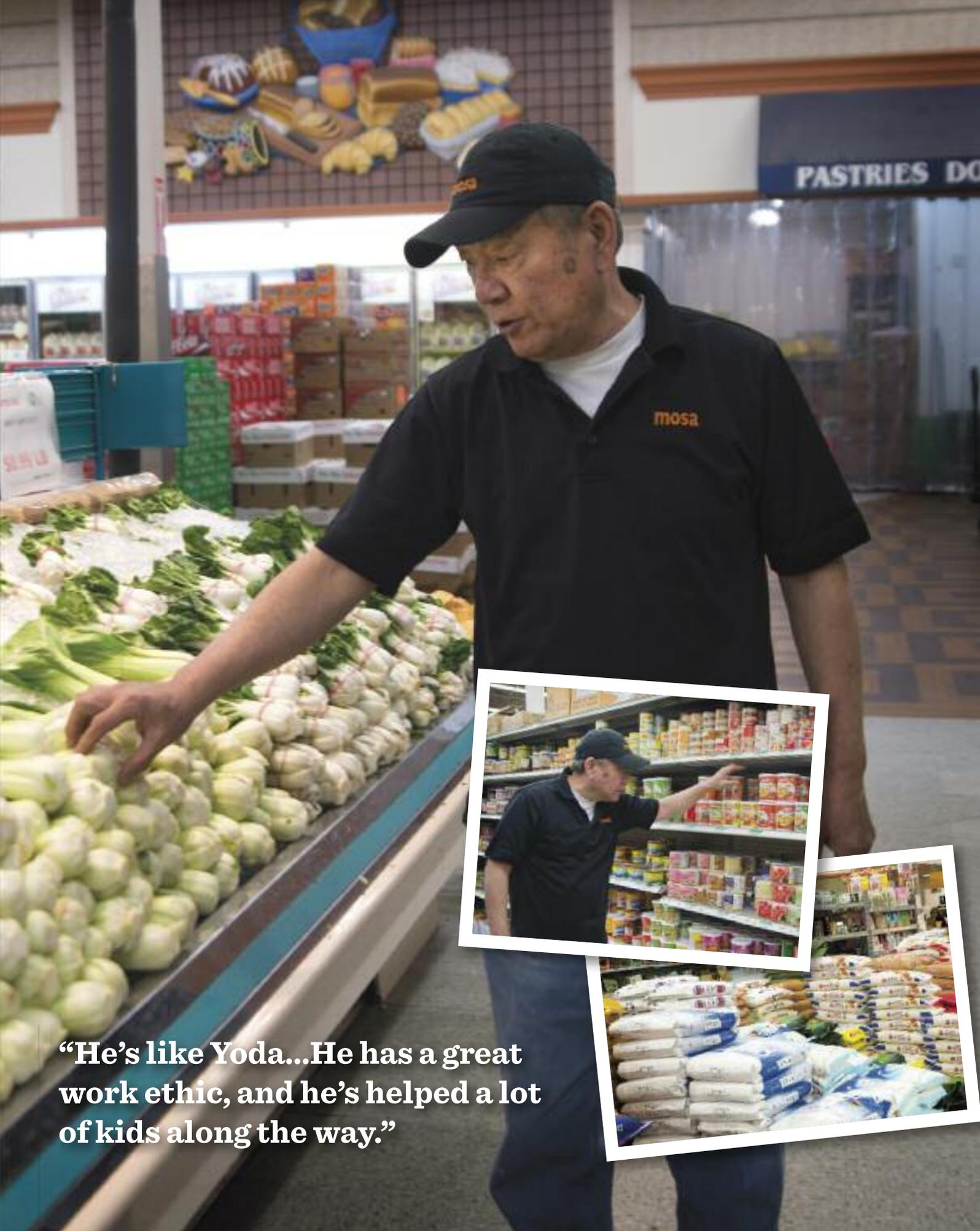
Eddie Pao got his start as a kung fu film director in Taipei. He still directs, but today, food is his medium. He can be found in the kitchen of his East Memphis restaurant, Mosa Asian Bistro.

Eddie opened his first restaurant in Memphis in 1978. It was an eight-table version of what would soon be known as Formosa, on Summer Avenue. He later opened another Formosa, on Quince at Kirby, but eventually decided to close his flagship restaurants to pursue something new. In 2005, at the age of 62, Eddie opened the first Mosa, on Poplar near Kirby. His daughter, Michelle Pao-Levine, says, “He wanted people to think, ‘Could it be the same?’ but come in and see that it was different.” Mosa focuses on Asian fusion. Pad thai is Eddie’s most popular dish. (Mosa was also named in *Memphis Magazine* as the one of the Top 5 for Thai.)

The original Mosa is now closed, so Eddie focuses his energy on the White Station location, which opened in 2008. Szechuan cooking is Eddie’s specialty, but he is also really good at noodle bowls and curries and is known for his crispy tofu and dumplings. Michelle says their last name is an English spelling of the Chinese word bao, which means dumpling.

Eddie focuses on consistency and just being himself. “He’s like Yoda,” says Michelle. “He has a great work ethic, and he’s helped a lot of kids along the way. Royal, Eat Well, Wang’s — they all have chefs who came from Eddie’s kitchen.”

Above, left to right: Outside the market; mushrooms and ginger galore. Opposite, top to bottom: Eddie Pao peruses the bok choy, finding the right curry sauce; mountains of rice.



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The Market

Eddie and Michelle do a lot of their shopping at the Winchester Farmers' Market. Though a distant relative is the owner, the real reason they love it is because they can find what they need. "Sometimes we have very specific requests," explains Michelle. "There are 13 ingredients just in our pad thai sauce, and we make 25 sauces from scratch every day — even our sweet-and-sour sauce and our hot mustard."

According to the manager, Daniel Kim, Winchester Farmers' Market stocks about 75 percent Hispanic, 20 percent Asian, and 5 percent other brands. Their sister store, Cordova International Farmers' Market, which opened in 2012, is twice as big and stocks the opposite — 75 percent Asian, 20 percent Hispanic, and 5 percent other brands. Daniel says they buy local when possible, but most of the produce comes from New York, California, and Texas. All of the meat is USDA choice, and they offer specialty items like cow and pig heads. Whole pigs are also available by special order. Both markets are open every day, including Christmas.

The Insider Trip

Michelle and Eddie let me tag along on a recent shopping trip for an insider's look at the market. Eddie's first stop is the refrigerated section near the entrance of the store that houses tofu. He prefers the Japanese JFC House premium medium-firm tofu. "I go through two cases a day," he says. "Tofu can be very crispy." (The secret is to sear the tofu to give it a crispy skin.)

Next we head to the back wall of the produce section where there are all kinds of greens. Michelle says a lot of Chinese Memphians grow produce in their backyards and sell it to the market. Must-haves for Eddie are green beans, Thai basil leaf, cilantro, chives, napa cabbage, and leeks. He also looks for items that are lesser known to American palates:

- Bitter melon — cooked down it is less bitter but used mostly at home
- Fuzzy squash — good for soup but used mostly at home
- Gai choy — also bitter and used at home (boiled and blanched in oyster sauce)
- Chinese celery — thinner than the American counterpart
- Japanese cucumber — also known as English cucumber, longer and thinner
- Chong gak moo — small turnip root used in pickled slaw
- Shanghai (baby) bok choy — has a better taste than the large version
- Lime leaf — used in many sauces

Eddie finishes up his tour of the produce section with loads of fresh ginger and garlic, which are the aromatic base for most of his cooking.

Next we head over to the large rice section near aisle 10. Eddie says that even though white rice tastes better, he sells a lot of brown rice because it

is healthier. The secret to cooking brown rice is to use much more water and to steam it, he says. Mosa goes through about 300 pounds per week. Eddie prefers the Botan Calrose Brown Rice, which the store stocks at his request.

For sushi, Eddie suggests mixing the Han Kuk Mi Sweet Rice with Kokuho Rose Extra Fancy.

On aisle 13, Eddie points out the best curries. He uses Maesri Masaman Curry and Chu Chee Red Curry. "Always double-check the date," he advises.

Other essentials in this section include soy sauce from Kikkoman, sesame oil, and Three Crabs/Viet Huong Fish Sauce. "Fish sauce is the secret ingredient that makes everything delicious," says Michelle. She and Eddie both strongly advise against spilling it. "I spilled it in my car, and it took two months to get the smell out," remembers Eddie.

We head over to the rice paper and noodle section. For spring rolls, Eddie likes the Three Ladies Brand rice paper. "You have to soak it in cold water," he advises. He also uses Taiwanese vermicelli glass noodles wrapped in pink netting. "It's a 60-year-old brand." For his famous pad thai, he uses the Three Ladies Brand medium-sized rice sticks. "Rice noodle is good for gluten-free diets," he says. "Soak them in cold water for at least two hours, then cook in hot water about ten seconds."

Though packed with unfamiliar items and brands, as well as labels with foreign languages, specialty markets provide access to unique ingredients and a bit of culinary adventure. Don't let the unknown intimidate you. Start with Eddie's favorites and grab whatever else looks interesting. 

Winchester Farmers' Market

6616 Winchester Road, Memphis
901-795-1525 • 8:30 AM–9:00 PM

Cordova Farmers' Market

1150 N. Germantown Parkway, Cordova
901-417-8407 • 9:00 AM–9:00 PM

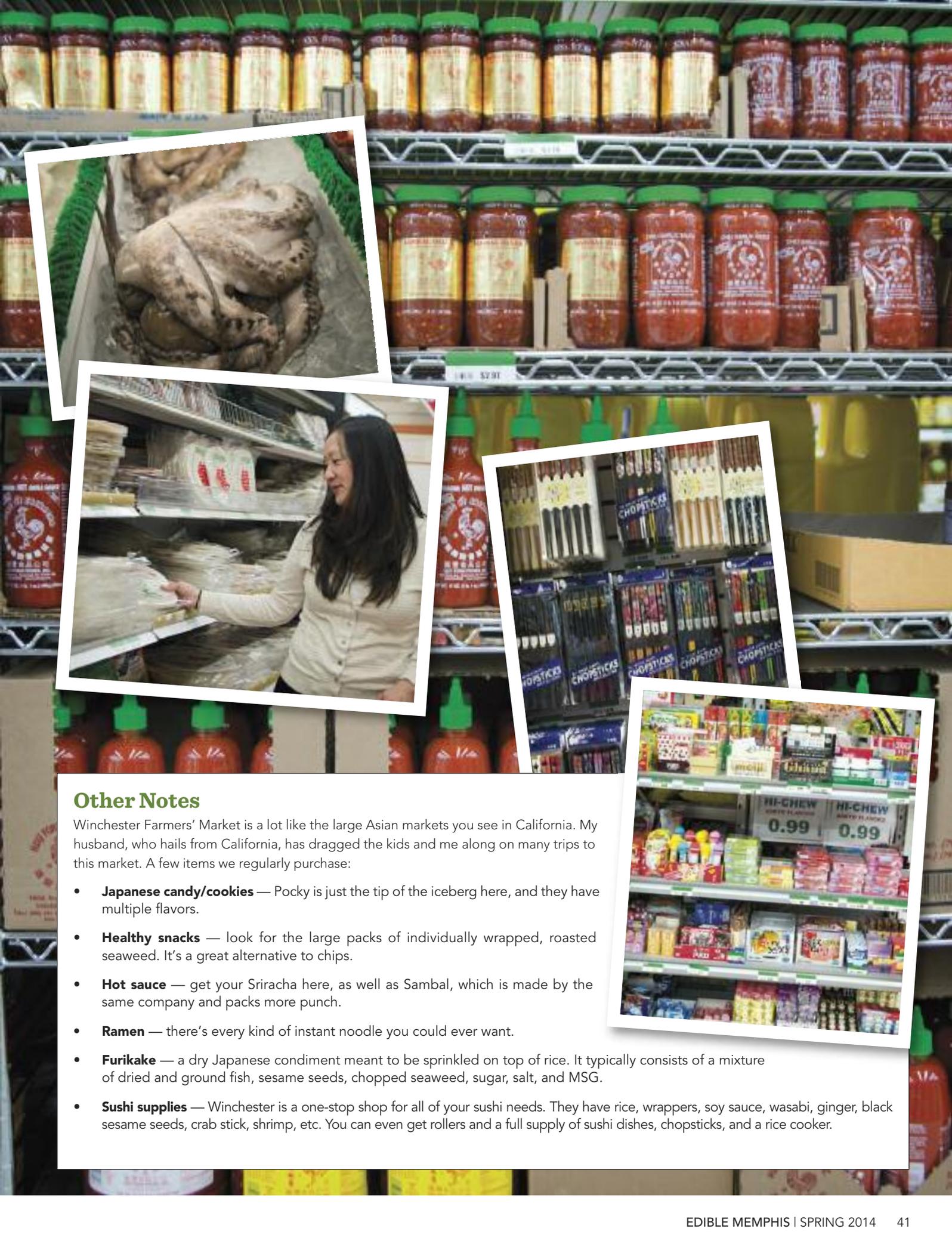
Viet Hoa Food Market

40 N. Cleveland Street • 901-726-9388

Mosa Asian Bistro

850 S. White Station • 901-683-8889
www.mosaasianbistro.com

Opposite: Sriracha anyone? No shortage here. Top to bottom: Fresh octopus; Michelle grabs some rice wrappers; decorative chopsticks; just a portion of the candy selection.



Other Notes

Winchester Farmers' Market is a lot like the large Asian markets you see in California. My husband, who hails from California, has dragged the kids and me along on many trips to this market. A few items we regularly purchase:

- **Japanese candy/cookies** — Pocky is just the tip of the iceberg here, and they have multiple flavors.
- **Healthy snacks** — look for the large packs of individually wrapped, roasted seaweed. It's a great alternative to chips.
- **Hot sauce** — get your Sriracha here, as well as Sambal, which is made by the same company and packs more punch.
- **Ramen** — there's every kind of instant noodle you could ever want.
- **Furikake** — a dry Japanese condiment meant to be sprinkled on top of rice. It typically consists of a mixture of dried and ground fish, sesame seeds, chopped seaweed, sugar, salt, and MSG.
- **Sushi supplies** — Winchester is a one-stop shop for all of your sushi needs. They have rice, wrappers, soy sauce, wasabi, ginger, black sesame seeds, crab stick, shrimp, etc. You can even get rollers and a full supply of sushi dishes, chopsticks, and a rice cooker.