

# The 60-second interview: Chris Ying, editor in chief, *Lucky Peach*



Chris Ying. (Jami Witek)

By **CAPITAL STAFF** 2:00 p.m. | Mar. 31, 2015

**CAPITAL:** Momofuku owner and chef David Chang helped found *Lucky Peach* in 2011. What's his involvement in the magazine—which racked up four James Beard Award nominations this year—these days?

**YING:** Dave remains actively involved. He's like an oracle of ideas. He's like the singing bush in “¡Three Amigos!” where he kind of delivers ideas and thoughts on things to us in melodic form and we have to kind of parse what he said into usable content. But David is actually very good at deputizing people and hiring people he trusts to run operations and give them independence.

**CAPITAL:** In 2013, *Lucky Peach* decided to operate itself independently, dropping McSweeney's as its publisher. How has that been working for the magazine as a business? Has its circulation continued to grow?

**YING:** Circulation grows, as do our extra-curricular activities...The truth of the matter is we couldn't have launched without McSweeney's. Having that body of publishing knowledge and that sort of fount of creativity was incredibly important to us. Plus I worked there. But we just became sort of too large of a thing to be published by a small publisher in San Francisco. And we were becoming as much of a burden to them as a benefit, so I think it was healthy for us to split off.

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**CAPITAL:** We can't think of any other food magazine that includes fiction. Why publish it in *Lucky Peach*?

**YING:** The point of starting your own magazine, or the only real benefit I think, is

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meets conservative leaders—Charter-  
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being able to do whatever the hell you want.  
And we always wanted to have fiction in a food  
magazine, so it exists in our magazine for no  
other reason than we like short fiction.

**CAPITAL:** *Lucky Peach* graduated its online presence from a Tumblr page to a multi-page website earlier this year. Why was it time to do that?

**YING:** We never were resisting putting up a website for any sort of philosophical reasons. It really comes down to just logistics. We started the magazines as three people. We didn't have a website because we didn't have time to make a website... We're trying to grow as naturally as possible, and thankfully, we're expanding our staff now and just have the personnel to make a website. So we want to do with the web what we've done with the print magazine and adjust our form to the medium and make the kind of food website that we would like to read.

**CAPITAL:** According to an essay you published in *Bon Appétit*, you joined Weight Watchers to lose weight for your wedding and then promptly gained everything back the night of the celebration (although we imagine that's a bit of an exaggeration). Since then, what's been your philosophy about eating and maintaining your weight as someone who works at a job where food is an "occupational hazard"?

**YING:** Writing that article has been the greatest regret of my life. I could try to sell you something about how you eat healthy at home and then you let yourself go when you're doing it for work, but that's not true, because I eat two sandwiches by myself in my room at midnight. So I don't have any great philosophy to sell you other than I don't feel like it's killing me yet. Hopefully, when I get to that point, I'll stop eating so much food.

**CAPITAL:** You've said that you have heard *Lucky Peach* forever described as a masculine magazine. Do you think food media should reflect the male-dominated character of the professional restaurant world it covers or should it try to change that?

**YING:** As far as whether a magazine should try to change the restaurant or cooking industry, I don't really think that's ever been our function and goal. We're fans of the industry and we're a reflection of it, for better or worse. We have no overt agenda to change that about it. That being said, would it be better if women were better represented? Yes. Would we like to see that? Yes. But usually we're just trying to survive our deadlines.

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