

Food Fit for a Korean King

Tiger Mama is a Korean food restaurant that serves traditional dishes with healthy ingredients

BY EMILY ROGERS

In ancient Korea, royal feasts consisted of a vast array of dishes with up to 12 side dishes as offerings to support the king's health and digestion, according to Preston Shin, owner of Tiger Mama. At Tiger Mama, a Korean restaurant on West 3rd Avenue, diners can experience food fit for a king with elaborate dishes created by chef Sunny Moon.

Moon and Shin, her husband, who also own Sushi Pure, opened Tiger Mama last February as an ode to Moon's cooking. "I opened this for my wife to feature her Korean cooking skills," Shin says.

As the name Tiger Mama might imply, Moon serves grandma-style homey Korean cuisine. "All the Asian American kids' moms are tiger mamas, so we thought that the name and food is going to remind them of their mom's cooking," Moon says. A tiger mother is an Asian mom who pushes her children towards high levels of achievement.

When you enter the restaurant you are greeted by smiling wait staff yelling, "Oseyo" in unison, which means "welcome" in Korean. The interior of the restaurant is a soothing homey space with traditional Korean red and blue lanterns dimly lighting the colorful tables.

Customers at Tiger Mama are served as if they are a part of Moon's family. "I cook for my kids, I cook for my parents, and my husband and I do the same thing for my customers," she says.

For Shin, the way food makes you feel

after you eat it is the most important hallmark of a restaurant. "When I eat her food I feel thankful that I can eat this food, and then the after-feeling is amazing, too. I feel healthier and stronger," Shin says.

Moon uses flavors found in Asian fruits and other produce to elevate the taste of her dishes, creating a bountiful range of flavors for the tongue. "It's very hard to find a good Asian restaurant because sometimes they taste good, but they use too much MSG," Shin says.

Moon's vegan, gluten-free kimchi, beloved by her husband and raving customers, was born out of her consideration for her customers' health and dietary restrictions.

Traditional kimchi is made with fish sauce and salty shrimp. Within the first couple of months of serving customers at her restaurant Moon noticed that many of them were saddened that they couldn't try the kimchi because they were vegetarian. So Moon got to work developing a recipe that tastes just as good as her grandmother's traditional recipe, but with a few tweaks.

Instead of seafood ingredients Moon uses dried shiitake mushrooms, plums, apples and pears to create her kimchi. "It tastes very bright, and people who didn't used to like kimchi try it and they love it," Shin says.

Fermenting and brewing are two of Moon's passions.

For those trying Korean cuisine or Tiger Mama for the first time, Shin and

'I cook for my kids, I cook for my parents and my husband and I do the same thing for my customers.'

— Sunny Moon



HOT STONE BEEF BULGOGI BIBIMBAP.
Photo by Eve Weston

Moon recommend the KFC — Korean fried chicken — which can be tossed in either honey garlic soy sauce or spicy *gochujang*, a fermented chili paste. However, the dish is not complete without a glass of Korean beer, as Shin and Moon say that Korean people think of the combo of chicken and beer as God's gift.

The crunchy, juicy wings are so delectable that one customer even gave up five years of veganism to try the dish. "There was a young couple that came in and they ordered our KFC and then the boyfriend came up to me and thanked me saying, 'You broke her veganism, she loved this chicken,'" Shin says.

For those who are more experienced in Korean cuisine, Shin recommends customers try *bibimbap*, a Korean rice bowl topped with veggies, marinated beef and a fried sunny side up egg because it reminds him

the most of Korea.

Served in a black stone pot the dish continues to be warmed from the bottom up giving the rice at the bottom a nice crunch. Shin will even mix the bowl for you to make sure you are able to get the egg yolk and rice cooked just right for a hearty bite of meat and rice.

Providing healthy Korean food to the Eugene community is Shin and Moon's way of sending a love letter to the place that had shown them so much love from Sushi Pure to now.

"I just love our customers and I feel so lucky so I want to give them something back that I can do well which is making food," Moon says.

Tiger Mama is open 5 pm to 9:30 pm Monday, 11:30 am to 2:30 pm and 5 pm to 9:30 pm Tuesday through Friday, 3 pm to 9:30 pm Saturday and closed Sunday at 1080 West 3rd Avenue, 458-273-3166.

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