



MEET KIMMY TANG, JULIA CHILD'S ASIAN ALTER EGO

by Andrea Lita Rademan

Julia Child's groundbreaking cookbook, ***Mastering the Art of French Cooking***, written with Simone Beck and [Louisette Bertholle in 1961](#), made history by introducing [French cooking techniques](#) to American home cooks. But it also made clear that the simplest recipes are the most difficult to prepare because they depend on impeccable ingredients and painstaking techniques.

Before attempting even a humble cabbage soup, Child carefully studied the greatest cookbooks of her day and then contemplated what variety of cabbage would work best, what to put in the broth, how long to cook it and at what temperature. She said, "I had to iron out all of these questions of how and why and for what reason; otherwise, we'd end up with just an ordinary recipe ... I felt we should strive to show (our readers) how to make everything top-notch, and explain, if possible, why things work one way but not another. There should be no compromise!"

That "no compromise" attitude is a rarity and it's why there are many good cooks but few great ones. Kimmy Tang is one of the great ones. Born in Vietnam four years after Child's book was published, she was already experimenting in her family's kitchen by the age of five — proof that the greatest chefs are born, not made — and by the time she had moved to Los Angeles, learned English, and dipped into Child's cookbook, she was almost single-handedly running her first restaurant, Michelia, a petite Euro Asian bistro with a Zagat rave and a star following.



Growing up in a country that the French colonized in the late 1880s and didn't leave for nearly a century, Tang was exposed to French-influenced dishes such as bánh mì (baguette sandwiches); Vietnamese coffee (French presse brewed dark roast); bánh cuốn (stuffed fresh rice crepes) and, of course, phở (noodle soup), Vietnam's national dish. There is no written history of the dish but the name is generally thought to have been adapted from "feu" (pronounced "fuh," as is "phở"), which is French for "fire." The name "9021Pho" is a three-way play on words, which embraces its French and Vietnamese roots and plants them firmly in America soil.

Before the French took over, cows were used only for work. Eating them would have been unimaginable and unaffordable. But soon people were slurping pho bo (beef pho), cartilaginous beef marrow bones, tripe and beef tendon. Pho ga (chicken pho) was made with leftover chicken — meat, skin and bones included. Even today, and even in the U.S., this is how most restaurants prepare pho.

Not so at 9021Pho, where Tang takes an artisanal approach, emphasizing locally grown seasonal vegetables and fruits offset with fresh herbs, such as lemongrass, Vietnamese mint and long coriander, some of which she grows onsite. She relies mostly on poaching, baking, grilling or stir frying, always using minimal oil and never adding cornstarch to thicken her sauces.

The pho section of the menu showcases pho bo, carpaccio-thin slivers of lean beef; pho ga, slices of tender skinless chicken breast; pho ca, filet of white fish in place of canned tuna; and pho chay, tofu in carrot, daikon, ginger, shallot and onion broth, a dish that was born in Old World Buddhist temples and migrated to New World vegetarian restaurants. For those who prefer assertive flavors, a spicy-sour version features fresh sole cooked in a chili garlic base broth flavored with tamarind and a generous mix of bok-choy, baby corn, mushroom and snap peas.



To make each dish, she simmers all of the ingredients in water for a minimum of three hours, after which she skims off and discards any excess fat. Tang's

vegetables, whether they are part of the broth or served on garnish trays with lime and Thai basil leaves, are always fresh and crisp.

In the hands of this master chef one of the healthiest cuisines in the world is also one of the most delicious. Kimmy Tang has mastered the art of Vietnamese cooking and surely, Julia would have approved.

I can't give details yet but they are looking to next open outside the city. it's pretty amazing and never happened to a sweeter person.

Current locations are all in the Los Angeles Area but there may soon be a 9021Pho coming to a neighborhood near you.

<http://9021pho.com>

9021Pho Beverly Hills
490 N. Beverly Drive, Beverly Hills, CA 90210
(310) 275-5277

9021Pho Westlake Village
30990 Russell Ranch Road, Westlake Village, CA 91362
(818) 597-1902

9021Pho Sherman Oaks
14006 Riverside Drive, Sherman Oaks, CA 91423
(818) 536-7364

9021Pho Glendale
100 West Broadway, Glendale, CA 91210
(818) 536-7364