

LA REVIEW

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Shiku

KOREAN • DOWNTOWN LA

PERFECT FOR: DINING SOLO LUNCH QUICK EATS

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JANUARY 13, 2022

A meal at Shiku, a stall in the Grand Central Market from the people behind now-closed Baroo, feels like attending a high school reunion. Your friends aren't the wild-eyed Marxists who once swore to topple America's capitalist regime anymore. They're adults with families and jobs in sales, equipped with diversified portfolios and/or one-to-two minivans sitting in the parking lot. People have settled down; classmates are grown-up. It's not a bad thing, just a natural part of life.

Similarly, the themes at Shiku are recognizable enough - Korean cooking, lots of kimchi, etc. - but for the most part, compared to Kwang Uh and Mina Park's previous projects, everyone has moved forward.

Armed with a newfound formula of comfort dishes, an easily accessible location, and a slight departure from its funky, experimental roots, Shiku represents the next generation in the Baroo family tree. One that's settled down, is more mature. By scaling back on the obscure fermentations and pickling practices that made Baroo famous, Shiku brings innovative Korean food to an even broader mainstream.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. For some context, before there was Shiku, there was Baroo Canteen, and before Baroo Canteen, there was Baroo. Back in 2016, there were no fine dining dosirak pop-ups or menus dedicated solely to banchan in LA. The city's Korean food was mostly defined by legacy Koreatown restaurants. When Baroo dropped onto the scene, it was like they had tossed a piano out of a window, a la Looney Tunes, with all of Los Angeles waiting unsuspectingly below.

Before long, all anyone could talk about was the new fermentation lab in a quiet Hollywood strip mall, including us.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Three years later, a major business partner exited, and Baroo became too unsustainable to run. The shop closed, but not for long, quickly reborn in an abandoned Thai Town swap meet. The only catch? The building was set to be demolished by the end of the year. Surprisingly, the second iteration was even greater than the first. Kimchi shrimp toast was smeared thick with a layer of prawn compound, pastrami fried rice (officially dubbed "International Affairs di Pastrami") looked straight out of a Renaissance painting. It was Baroo's rebellious younger sibling, dramatic and demanding of our attention, if only for a limited time.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Which, of course, brings us to Shiku. Unlike past iterations, the order-at-the-counter spot isn't run out of some obscure strip mall or short-lived swap meet: it's in the Grand Central Market. With that move, everything shifted - the majority of diners are no longer in-the-know obsessives or people in the food scene, they're out-of-town tourists crossing a to-do off their bucket list. Their well-known fermentation dishes have taken a back seat, splitting the menu between recognizable favorites like galbi-jjim or marinated chicken plates and hyper-specific, regional banchan.

We've seen two separate kimchis occupy the menu (which rotates constantly), one bright-red and slightly salty, made in the style of the Jeolla province and one stir-fried with perilla seeds and oil. Containers are filled to the brim with smoky, bright-red corn kernels and japchae made from seaweed. Our current favorite is the chwinamul, a wild mountain green dotted with sesame seeds that transports us to a simple life filled with goat herding and reading by candlelight whenever we eat it.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

On one hand, Shiku doesn't offer the avant-garde, laser-focused fermentations the original Baroo did. But with its latest chapter, Shiku, is able to do something just as revolutionary: deliver excellent, world-class Korean cooking to an audience who might not have a lot of experience with the cuisine. Your friends at the reunion aren't here to change the world by setting it on fire - they've realized that leading a stable, halcyon life is perhaps the most radical move of them all. Which isn't to say Shiku will never return to its experimental roots (Baroo 3.0 is supposedly in the works), but in the meantime, it's exciting to see workers on their lunch break, Kwang and Mina's die-hard fans, and families with small children, all huddled together in front of Shiku's red-brick counter.

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Food Rundown



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LA Galbi

Inspired by the packed lunches of Korean school children, the kalbi dosirak is a well-rounded meal perfect for a quick lunch or eating on-the-go. Braised short ribs are sliced nice and thick, made mouthwateringly juicy, the result of lots and lots of marbling. Depending on whether you inhale it there or not (basically, if there's travel involved), the presentation might not be 100%. But you won't even care because the meat is so freaking tender, all but falling off the bone.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Maekjuk Chicken

The leaner, poultry option - if red meat isn't your thing. This is our favorite dish on the menu because, unlike our relationship with our therapist, it's actually quite simple. One of Korea's oldest recipes (marinated pork grilled over an open flame) is ushered into modernity, opting for succulent chicken breasts glazed with fermented soybean paste. So flavorful, so moist! A vaguely nutty soybean powder coats the chicken, making for big, savory, smoky bites. Paired with a bed of white rice and three daily banchans, name a more iconic trio. You can't.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Kimchi-Braised Pork Belly

This might just be an ill of the takeout system, but pork belly really doesn't travel well. Unless you literally crack your plate open as soon as you get it, the meat tends to get a bit soggy on the journey home. Which is a shame, because the pork itself is nicely seasoned, composed of equal parts fat and meat which are flavored with a bit of pepper.

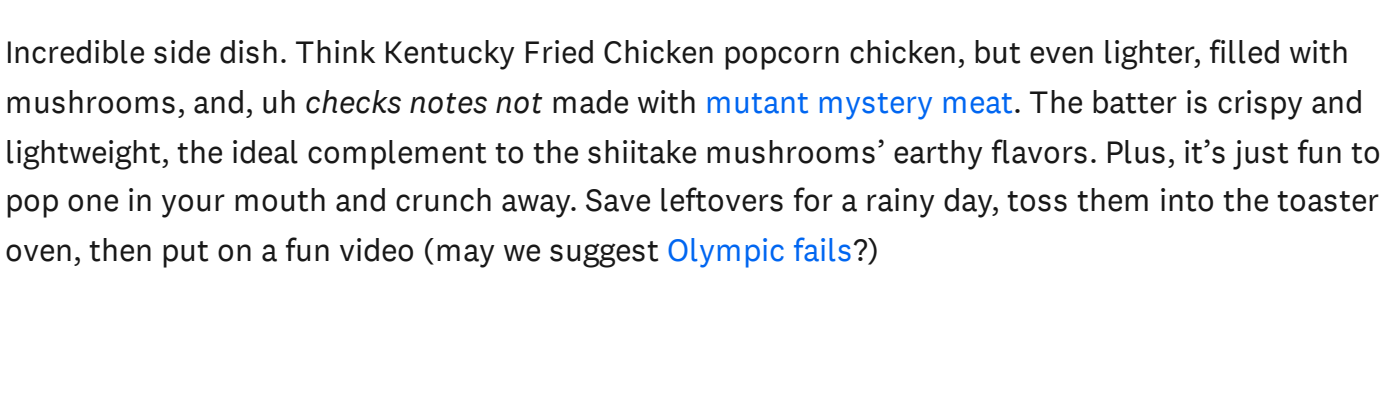


PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Temple Tangsu (Vegan)

Incredible side dish. Think Kentucky Fried Chicken popcorn chicken, but even lighter, filled with mushrooms, and, uh checks notes *not* made with mutant mystery meat. The batter is crispy and lightweight, the ideal complement to the shitake mushrooms' earthy flavors. Plus, it's just fun to pop one in your mouth and crunch away. Save leftovers for a rainy day, toss them into the toaster oven, then put on a fun video (may we suggest [Olympic falls?](#))

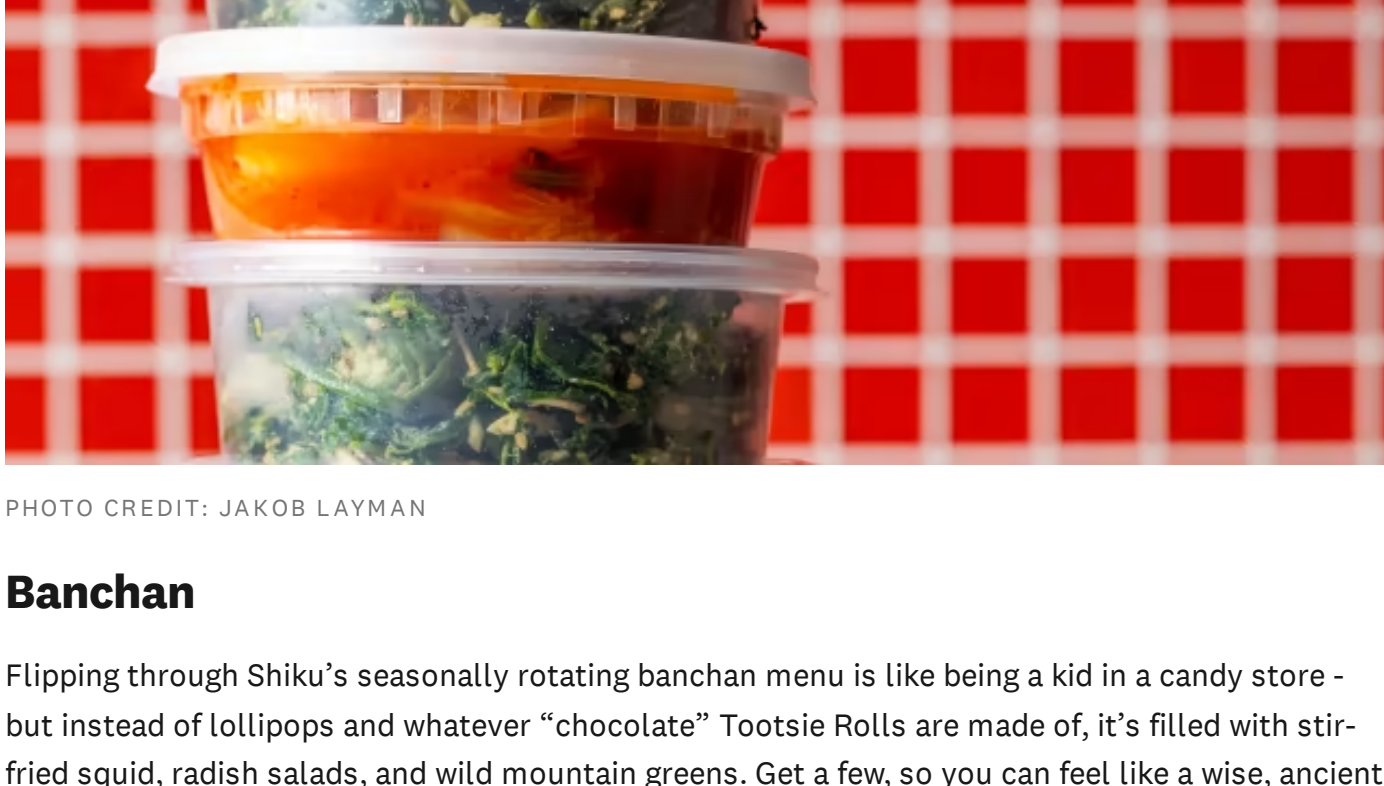
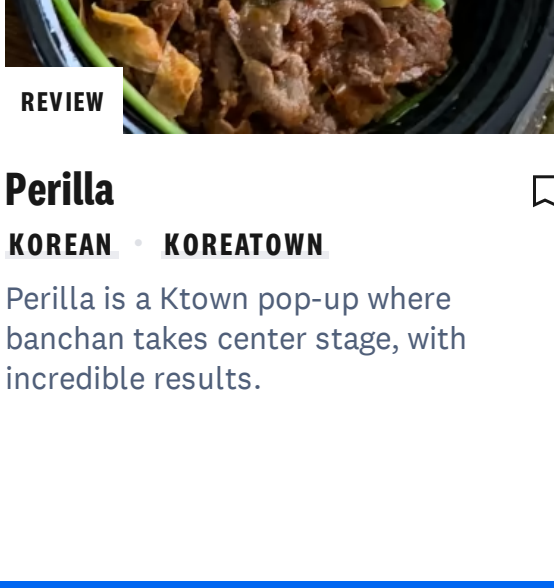
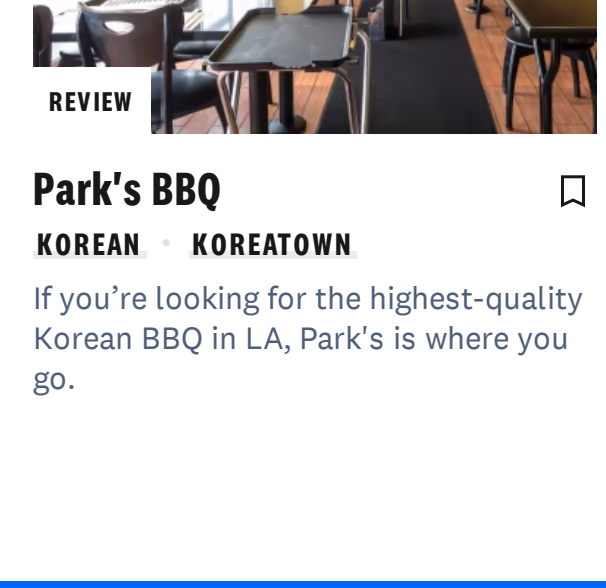
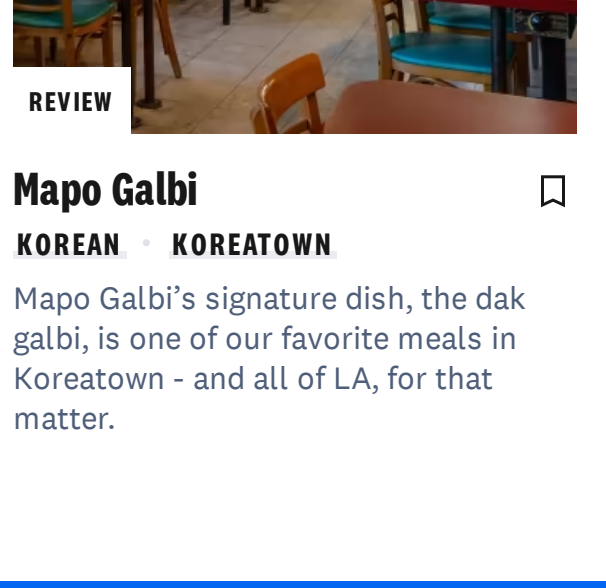
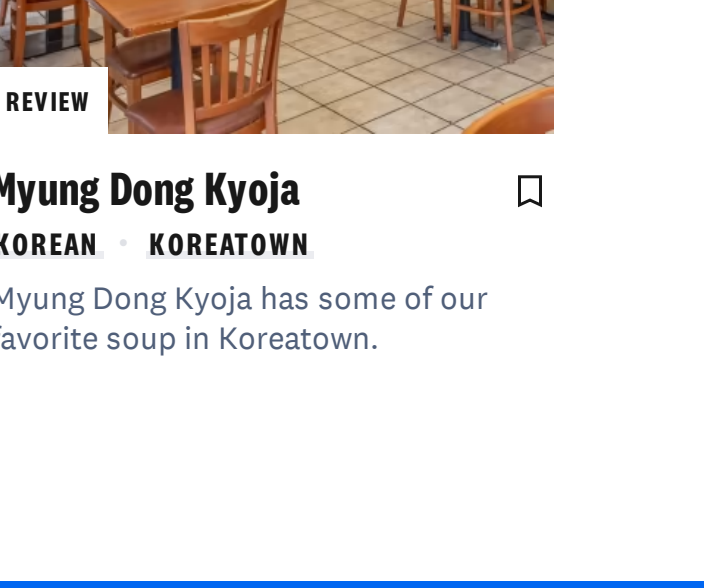


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Banchan

Flipping through Shiku's seasonally rotating banchan menu is like being a kid in a candy store - but instead of lollipops and whatever "chocolate" Tootsie Rolls are made of, it's filled with stir-fried squid, radish salads, and wild mountain greens. Get a few, so you can feel like a wise, ancient store owner at an apothecary shop whenever you reach into the fridge to grab their crackling myulchi saewoo bokkeum, a dried shrimp and anchovy mix that's great for a snack or sprinkling over a salad.

SUGGESTED READING

 <p>Perilla KOREAN KOREATOWN</p> <p>Perilla is a Ktown pop-up where banchan takes center stage, with incredible results.</p>	 <p>Park's BBQ KOREAN KOREATOWN</p> <p>If you're looking for the highest-quality Korean BBQ in LA, Park's is where you go.</p>	 <p>Mapo Galbi KOREAN KOREATOWN</p> <p>Mapo Galbi's signature dish, the dak galbi, is one of our favorite meals in Koreatown - and all of LA, for that matter.</p>	 <p>Myung Dong Kyoja KOREAN KOREATOWN</p> <p>Myung Dong Kyoja has some of our favorite soup in Koreatown.</p>
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