

A Family Affair for Kathy Fang of Fang Restaurant

By Keith Mizuguchi



With the inaugural Lucky Rice Festival taking place in San Francisco on Friday, September 6, we're taking a look at some of the participating chefs, to see the role Asian cooking has played in their lives as chefs. First up, Kathy Fang of Fang Restaurant and House of Nanking.

Fang, perhaps more than many other chefs, grew up in the kitchen, spending many hours of her youth at San Francisco's legendary House of Nanking, owned by her parents. "I really grew up in a chef's environment. I was listening to things, taking things in and that time really fostered my love of food," she said. "I would talk to chefs that were hanging out late night at our restaurant or go out with chefs and my parents. It really became a passion early in life."



That passion grew at home as Kathy grew older. She would ask her parents each week to buy produce and create the dishes she was becoming more and more familiar with. Like many Asian families, the cooking was not just a part of her immediate family, but also her extended family as well. “Every Sunday, we’d spend time eating with our grandparents. And whenever we would get together, we would always talk about food, critiquing dishes, what was good and bad about a dish.”

Her experiences quickly became a career choice, as Fang ending up enrolling at the Le Cordon Bleu Culinary School, which she said gave her a fresh new perspective to cooking, introducing her to many French techniques she was not familiar with. The result – she decided to open a new restaurant in partnership with her father, Fang Restaurant, in the South of Market neighborhood in 2009.

The restaurant takes a lot of what she grew up with at House of Nanking, combining it with what she learned in her training at Cordon Bleu. She said she wanted to include dishes that she knew well, but put her own take on them. “I wanted Fang to be about things we love to eat, things I grew up with, but also to make things new and exciting” Fang said. “I think many times, the best kind of meals are those that bring about fond memories and that’s what we are hoping to do.”



Working in the kitchen, while also keeping up her blog and developing a cookbook, Fang maintains a busy schedule, but growing up in the industry has helped her with all the ups and downs. “Sharing the same passion as my father has been great and I think it makes our relationship better. He knows what I’m going through and I’m the same way. Lots of people even say we think similarly.”

The schedule and life of a chef is always difficult to fully comprehend, but with the support of family that understands, Fang has been able to make the transition to heading the kitchen at Fang, and building a name for herself in San Francisco’s culinary world. She will be presenting a dish of Northern Style Vegetarian Dumplings w/ Chili Sesame Sauce and Crispy Garlic at the Lucky Rice Festival on Friday, September 6th at the Ferry Building.