



Garak guksu at Sol's on Sheridan.

# GOOD FOR THE SOL'S

## SOL'S IS GOOD, LOW-KEY KOREAN BARBECUE

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

Love has done a lot of things for the world, but it has not brought me great bulgogi. That is until now, for Sol's on Sheridan, a new Korean restaurant in Uptown that serves great red chili-slathered beef, has landed in Chicago as a result of a great love affair.

Sol Yu was born into a restaurant family in South Korea. Her brother moved to Madison, Wisconsin to attend college, and soon the family followed. They decided to open a restaurant. Yu started in the front of the house, but the restaurant had a tough time keeping good cooks, so she took over the kitchen and Sol's on the Square flourished. Though it was successful, things changed when Yu met Chicago-native Alex Wirtz at Do Division Street Fest.

"I'm a native Chicagoan, and when she came here, she really fell in love with Chicago," Wirtz said.

So Yu sold the Madison restaurant and moved here. The original plan was to open a food truck, serving bingsu, a traditional Korean dessert that's a cross between Mario's Italian Lemonade and an airy snow cone. But after thinking about it, the pair decided to open a full restaurant instead.

### The room

Though Sol's is located in a humble blue-awning-clad Chicago storefront, the

interior has been transformed into a modern oasis, featuring slate gray paint, high ceilings and hand-built dark wood tables from one of Yu's Madison friends, Rob King. Some of the seating is made up of couches so comfy you'll wish you could stick around and watch Netflix after a meal.

### The food

My list of top five favorite meals has to include Korean barbecue. As a city of compressed lots and stacked real estate, Chicago is basically one giant fire hazard, and while I'm pretty good at sneaking in a few grill sessions during the summer, I generally always do so hoping I don't set my neighbor's three-flat ablaze. So the idea that I can go indoors and grill meat over live charcoal while I down icy cold Korean OB beer worry-free is a nice feeling.

This is why I like Sol's. If you only have a party of two, that's no problem. The prices are great and the portions reasonable.

There is gimbab, which is basically Ko-

rea's version of Japanese maki. Seafood is replaced by silky slivers of meat, like spicy pork (\$8) sandwiched between pillars of custardy egg, tangy yellow radish, fiery fizzy kimchi and mineral-rich spinach. The seaweed wrap is supple. The rice grains are toothsome and distinct.

"Sol takes a couple extra steps in everything she does. Many places make their gimbab ahead of time and it gets soggy. She does everything to order," Wirtz said.

Bibimbap (\$10), the classic Korean mixed rice bowl, features an artful arrangement of chopped carrot, zucchini and radish flanking a rosette of spicy gochujang or red pepper sauce nestled in rice and topped with a sunny side up yolk. Breach the yolk with chopsticks, mix everything all around, and you have a bowl of comfort that fuels you for hours.

There is also KFC—Korean fried chicken (\$10 for eight pieces). Most Korean fried poultry relies on fried crispy skin, but Yu batters her chicken in a fluffy coating, so they emerge looking like cottony tufted sheep hides. The airy batter and juicy 24-hour marinated flesh is splashed with a sweet and salty honey soy sauce. My only quibble is the chicken wings are stacked in a bowl and by the time I get to

the bottom, those pieces are soggy.

### Drinks and snacks

There's the usual assortment of sodas on offer as well as some Korean drinks like crushed pear juice (\$3.50), a tiny can which includes sweet pear nectar and flecks of pear. The real discovery, however, is a packet of Haitai honey butter potato chips (\$3.50). As you eat them, it feels like a hot pat of sweet butter is melting in your mouth. They made me want to go straight

home, roast a baked potato and slather it with butter and honey. According to Yu and Wirtz, honey butter chips have become a Korean obsession in the last few years, and they often sell out abroad. Domestically, you can, as I will when I finish writing

this, order them on Amazon.

### Bottom line

Sol's on Sheridan is offering great, fast and cheap Korean food. If you love Korean barbecue but can't make the commitment to a full sit-down experience, you'll love Sol's.

*Michael Nagrant is a RedEye freelancer. Reporters visit restaurants unannounced and meals are paid for by RedEye.*

### MINI-REVIEW

#### Sol's on Sheridan

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★★