



Dumplings from Bibim Town, a Korean restaurant in Edgewater.

Worth a trip

DUMPLINGS FROM BIBIM TOWN

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a dumpling.

Apologies to Joyce Kilmer for bastardizing the opening lines to his famous poem “Trees,” but I do love stuffed comfort food. If I were one of the people they eventually chose to colonize Mars and had to choose one earthly delight to take with me, it would probably be a lifetime supply of dumplings.

Because I live my life 100 carbs at a time, I know dough. And let me tell you—Bibim Town, a new a la carte Korean restaurant in Edgewater, is serving up some fabulous dough.

The wrappers are tender at the ends, but golden and crispy at the center and dappled with pockmarks from the sauté oil. Inside is a silky assortment of what I believed to be pork and scallion. But, this turns out to be a bit of an edible *trompe l'oeil*—the salty protein that apes nice ground pork turns out to be a soy-based substitute. While I generally abhor vegetarian approximations like nut-based cheeses and Tofurky, which taste nothing like what they purport to represent, if you're a lifelong vegetarian and have never tasted a traditional pork pot sticker, one bite of the Bibim Town dumpling is almost a perfect representation.

What's ironic is that almost everything at Bibim Town, from tender *ddokbokki* (\$5.99)—thick, puffy cheese curl-shaped rice cakes swimming in spicy broth—to the

fizzy kimchi that spices up a tender Korean pancake (\$5.99), is house made by owner/chef Soo Choi. And yet, the dumplings are a pre-made and purchased product, though one that was carefully chosen.

“I tried almost every Korean dumpling on the market, maybe like 100 of them, and this was the best,” said Choi.

The accompanying soy dipping sauce isn't just some store-bought Kikkoman dumped into a bowl. Choi has infused a base soy sauce with roasted mushrooms, scallions and toasted seaweed. The result is a savory bomb that explodes with complexity.

Choi is self-taught. Korean-born, she moved to Vancouver to attend college. She moved to Chicago with her husband 12 years ago. For the last eight years, she waited tables at Tsukasa of Tokyo in Vernon Hills and spent some time as a barista at Mariano's, which she credits for teaching her about service.

Her cooking chops come from her mom.

“I have three daughters. I wanted them to eat healthier. I was really influenced by my mom. She was a strict mom, so she expressed her love

through food. The love I got from her I wanted to give to my children,” said Choi. “Also, when my friends are having a bad time, and I want to share or cheer them up, I cook for them. With Bibim Town, I had a dream ... of bringing something to help people heal or help their stress through healthy food.”

The cool thing about Bibim Town is it's easy to order a large variety for one or two

BIBIM TOWN
5357 N. Broadway
773-961-7616



Korean pancakes.



Ddokbokki, or spicy rice cake stew.

people without breaking the bank (nothing on the menu is over \$11.99). The interior of Bibim Town includes a colorful mix of neon green and orange mod chairs. With white, surgical suite-worthy accents, it looks less like a restaurant and more like the office of an internet start-up. Choi, who said, “Everything from the wallpaper to the chairs is from Korea,” carefully planned

this. “I didn't want it to be like the traditional (Korean) spots, which are often too dark and old style. I wanted the interior to be bright, so young people will jump in the restaurant.”

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