

Scene Setter: Chi Dynasty

The Los Feliz mainstay opens a second location in Studio City featuring the same authentic dishes.



Opening night at Chi Dynasty in Studio City. (Gina Ferazzi / Los Angeles Times)

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By Jessica Gelt, Los Angeles Times

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Chinese food — in its quality, heat lamp-less form — is a near-perfect recession food. Order a plate of orange chicken and you might find yourself eating it, in a "Groundhog Day"-like scenario, for evenings on end. Which is why Mike Israyelyan, the head honcho of the trendy Muse Lifestyle Group, has paired with Jonathan Chi, the owner of Los Feliz's [Chi Dynasty](#), to open a [second Chi location](#) in Studio City.

And the duo has no intention of stopping with the Valley. They have their eyes on a nationwide franchise à la P.F. Chang's. The second location, which opened quietly last week, is a testing ground to see if Chi really can put the capital "D" in dynasty.

Longevity is obviously key to that equation, and in that department Chi is off to a galloping start: Jonathan Chi opened the original restaurant 27 years ago.

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"Back then, Los Angeles was a bit more formal," says Chi. "So when we first opened, the waiters wore tuxedos." But as the city traded in its empire-waist dresses with shoulder pads for sweatpants and ballcaps, Chi left its tuxedos in the hope chest

of history.

Still, the restaurant manages to maintain a certain class. It's stately, high-backed chairs; pristine white tablecloths; red back wall; and gold-embellished decorations are a calm and confident invitation into its dark, cool interior.

The Studio City location holds onto the same refined decorating scheme but adds a Muse-style gloss that makes you feel as if some scene of [John Woo](#)-inspired destruction is about to unfold (like in the opening sequence of "Hard Boiled" when a snazzy restaurant gets decimated in a shower of bullets).

The food remains mostly the same as that found at the original Los Feliz location. Chi's recipes are the result of decades of evolution. Chi's brother was the original chef, while Jonathan himself went on reconnaissance missions to the fine Chinese restaurants of New York City to gain inspiration for the menu, which has a heavy Mandarin influence.

Dishes are executed cleanly and in a straight-forward manner. This is not food with a twist, nor does it wink or nod toward fusion. If you order Kung Pao chicken you'll get a nice, large, moderately priced plate of it — spicy and with just the right amount of roasted peanuts. The same goes the tasty hot and sour soup; the crunchy, slippery aromatic shrimp with ginger and scallions; and the pork Szechuan slicked with a light garlic sauce.

Israyelyan, who has been eating at Chi since he was in high school and loves just about everything on the menu, says plans are in the work to open a backyard with a Chinese garden and customized beds for drinking, eating and lounging.

As nice as that sounds, Israyelyan's goals for Chi will leave him with little time to enjoy it. He and his partner Rob Vinokur, who specializes in marketing Muse's many restaurant and nightclub endeavors, are already talking about branding and creating hype.

"We're hoping the next one will be in West Hollywood, or maybe farther north to Calabasas," says Israyelyan.

jessica.gelt@latimes.com

Chi Dynasty

Where: 12229 Ventura Blvd., Studio City

When: 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily.

Price: Appetizers and soups, \$2.75 to \$15.75; entrees, \$11.95 to \$16.25

Contact: (818) 753-5300; <http://www.chidynasty.com>

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