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BLOGS FOOD

### Photos: inside Chinatown's new Sai Woo restaurant

by Carolyn Ali on April 13th, 2015 at 3:06 PM

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Sai Woo's "Cheek to Cheek" pasta dish mixes Italian and Asian influences.

CAROLYN ALI

Before I visited Sai Woo restaurant last week, I couldn't really picture what kind of food it served. The news release for the restaurant, which opened in late March, called the cuisine "**globally inspired**" with the dishes influenced by executive chef Douglas Chang's Chinese and Jamaican heritage.

Now that Sai Woo's [menu](#) is up on its website, the descriptions help to imagine what's on the table. And at a media gathering last week, I had a chance to try some of the dishes as a guest of the restaurant.

Have a look at the diverse offerings below—but first, a word

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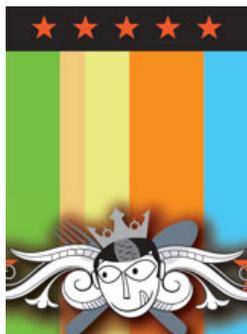
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about the brand-spanking-new room.

Sai Woo is located in Chinatown in a building with a rich heritage. It's named after the Sai Woo Chop Suey restaurant, which was at that location in the 1920s.

Sai Woo is located at street level in this tall heritage building in Chinatown.

📍 CAROLYN ALI

Inside, the restaurant couldn't be more modern, and it's got the kind of style we're used to seeing in Gastown. It took over two years to renovate the space, and designers Falken Reynolds and Domain Creative's Anna Walentowicz have done a fantastic job.

Inside Sai Woo.

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I love the Persian ironwood trees, which are real but not alive—they're carefully preserved in a process that's kind of like taxidermy for trees.

Sai Woo.

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Sai Woo is a big restaurant with seating for 100.

Inside Sai Woo.

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A downstairs lounge (below) isn't open yet but will provide 75 more seats and the option to rent it out for private functions.

A downstairs lounge is in the works.

📍 CAROLYN ALI

Sai Woo bar manager Justin Anello.

📍 CAROLYN ALI

Bar manager Justin Anello designed the bar menu and mixes drinks such as this refreshing Kom Collins. It's a twist on a Tom Collins, made with the o5 Kombucha that's on tap.

The food on the menu is designed to be shared, but the larger plates can stand alone as individual main courses, should you desire.

The Jamaican touches come through in things like a mignonette for the oysters on the half shell that's got a bit of Caribbean kick. (The Vancouver Island Lancelot oysters on offer the night I visited were plump and satisfying.)

The Jamaican influence is also apparent in the salt cod fritters, which are served with a Meyer lemon cream.

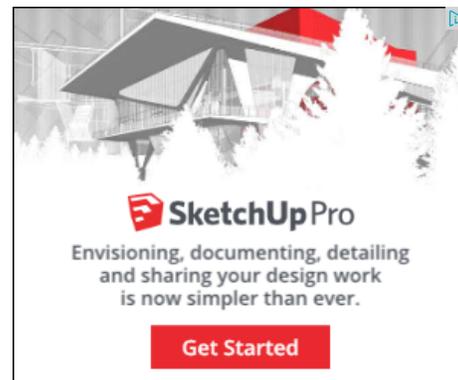
Tea-smoked tuna salad.

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 CAROLYN ALI

The Chinese influence comes through in dishes like this tea-smoked tuna (above), which is served with a soft Chinese tea egg and dressed with a Japanese miso vinaigrette.

It's also in the Chinese Jinhau ham broth that bathes this "Cheek to Cheek" pasta (below). The sweet pea-stuffed agnolotti is topped with guanciale and an herb and fennel salad. Fresh, spring-like, and full of flavour, this was one of my favourite dishes of the night.

Sai Woo's "Cheek to Cheek" pasta dish mixes Italian and Asian influences.

 CAROLYN ALI

Pork belly with taro purée.

 CAROLYN ALI

I also loved the fermented red tofu-glazed pork belly (above). It's served atop a smooth taro-root purée, and both the flavours and textures work well together.

Sai Woo's Beef Salad carpaccio.

 CAROLYN ALI

The "global" influence includes Italian flavours in this beef carpaccio (above), delicate and delicious topped with mustard greens, watercress, fried shallots, and Parmigiano-Reggiano.

Cola wings at Sai Woo.

 CAROLYN ALI

The Coca-Cola chicken wings are another starter that can't really be categorized. These mahogany-coloured babies arrive softly sticky rather than crispy, with meat that falls off the bone.

Sai Woo's hanger steak.

 CAROLYN ALI

Larger plates include this hanger steak with bitter melon and a black-bean *jus*.

The Black Cod dish is baked and served with kombu broth.

 CAROLYN ALI

The baked sablefish is a delicate main course that gets an Asian touch from the lotus root, burdock, and *kombu* broth.

"Sweet Nuggets" are tamarind-glazed sweetbreads with smoked potatoes.

 CAROLYN ALI

Tamarind-glazed sweetbreads (the small nuggets, above) mingle with delicious smoked potatoes.

Chinatown Jerk chicken.

CAROLYN ALI

The Chinatown Jerk chicken is tender and flavourful; it comes with "festival" bread (not pictured), a fritter that's popular in Jamaica.

Dishes at Sai Woo run \$5 to \$14 for snacks and small plates, and \$16 to \$27 for most main courses.

**Reservations** are accepted for parties of six or more.

You can follow Carolyn Ali on Twitter [@carolynali](#) and on Instagram [@carolynali](#).

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