



JUDY JOO

Ahead of the opening of the Hong Kong branch of Jinjuu, owner and TV celebrity chef Judy Joo speaks to about her mission to globalise Korean food and her love of bacon

TV food star Judy Joo has been keeping a busy schedule of late. Not only does she make regular appearances on The Food Network TV channel, cooking and talking about food, but earlier this year she opened her first restaurant, Jinjuu, in London. With the Hong Kong branch due to open this month, we chat to Judy to see what we should expect.

Korean culture and particularly Korean food has become hugely popular in the past few years. What is it about the cuisine that makes it so appealing?
Number one, it's full of flavour. Food has to be ridiculously tasty for it to become popular, so that obviously plays a major role. I think people really love the bright punchy flavours of Korea. There's nothing subtle about it. It's very much a 'what you see is what you get' cuisine. It's fiery, it's dramatic – like the people. Taking case in point, our national dish, kimchi, showcases what Korean food is all about. It's good for you, but at the same time it's really tasty.

When did you first get into cooking, has it always been a passion?

Well, I've always loved cooking, and particularly eating. But I was a banker before I became a chef. I graduated culinary school in 2004, and prior to that I was selling and trading for Morgan Stanley. That was my previous life, many eons ago, but I just got sick of it. I didn't love banking, I didn't love the markets. I decided that life was too short, so I quit and enrolled in the French Culinary Institute in New York City, and the rest is history.

Do you think your time on the trading floor helped your head for business?

Definitely! My time on the trading floor, and also my education, has been absolutely fundamental. Hard work, perseverance and dedication, plus strong business and communication skills – all of that is crucial in any industry. A lot of chefs don't come from an educational background, but I have an engineering degree that allows me to approach recipes with a scientific mindset, controlling the variables to figure out why things don't work. It definitely has all been a very solid building block to come into the food and beverage world.

The name Jinjuu means Pearl – what made you chose this for your restaurants?

Choosing a name was a very democratic process. We came up with a list of about 30 names, narrowed it down to the top four and then everyone voted. But it's also a very symbolic name, as pearls are rather mysterious in



easily go a couple of times a week, or more than that. We've got some street food favourites along with some really casual dishes, and everything is executed really well. I want it to feel really fun and convivial. We'll have a DJ playing great music and there'll be great cocktails too – all based on soju, which I think is something new and different.

Have you adapted the menu for Hong Kong?

We're going to change it a bit to suit the local market. I'm really looking forward to us opening in Hong Kong where I can get authentic Korean ingredients that we can't get our hands on in London.

How does your work as a presenter compare to running a restaurant and which role do you prefer?

They're so different! I would say that TV is just a lot easier. I just show up and have to come up with witty, pithy commentary, which can be difficult but it's just a small element of the entire production. Whereas since I own the restaurant and also run it, I have to think about everything – human resources, the accounting, the food, are we making money, how many covers did we do, is the building falling apart?

What's your favourite dish to make and to eat?

Instant spicy noodles are my single late night naughty snack. But otherwise, something a bit more highbrow... I love cooking seafood, I'm a big seafood eater. I also can't control myself around fried potatoes of any kind, I'm not a chocolate person, but put a can of Pringles or potato chips in front of me... that's my guilty pleasure.

You state on your Twitter everything tastes better with booze or bacon, have you added bacon to any of your dishes at Jinjuu?

Hahaha, I love bacon! We created our kimchi fried rice, versions of chilli bombs with pancetta and bacon in it... I also just love pork belly. We use it in a lot of different dishes – you can call that fresh bacon, I guess.

And have you considered a bacon and soju cocktail?

Well, bacon is very easy to infuse in alcohol because of the fat. We've actually been playing around with some of the meat. I think we're looking at the fried chicken first, but we haven't quite figured that out yet. Our signature cocktail, invented by our executive bar manager Kristian Breivik, is our Kimchi Bloody Mary – if you're a Bloody Mary fan you'll love ours.

Jinjuu, UG/F, California Tower, 32 D'Agular St

nature; they represent purity, longevity, wisdom and are often depicted in myths as having magical powers.

What can guests expect from the Hong Kong Jinjuu?

Hong Kong Jinjuu is going to be a lot of fun. It's a fashionable and casual place where people can go and have unpretentious food that's made from great ingredients. Food that looks beautiful and tastes amazing without having a lot of pretence around it. It's a place where I would like to think people can

"People really love the bright punchy flavours of Korean food"