

# Taste



THE BALTIMORE SUN | WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 2018

## Fried eggplant

Combined with mushrooms in a spicy Japanese broth, it's complex and delicious. **PG 2**

## Wine with lunch

We'd like to, but we dare not. **PG 3**



Phil Han is the restaurateur behind Dooby's, Sugarvale, Sundays and a number of forthcoming restaurants and cafes.

LLOYD FOX/BALTIMORE SUN

# Food networker

How a 32-year-old entrepreneur is quietly filling the voids in Baltimore's restaurant scene

BY SARAH MEEHAN  
The Baltimore Sun

Beneath a blue tent, eyes shaded from the morning sun by square Oakley lenses, Phil Han dishes out breakfast sandwiches to hungry patrons lined up for a taste of Dooby's.

It's the opening day of the Baltimore Farmers' Market and Bazaar, and orders are piling up. As cooks hastily layer bacon, eggs and cheese on sesame buns, Han spears each sandwich with a toothpick before turning to the horde in front of his tent.

"Egg and cheddar for Caitlin," he yells into the crowd, passing the steaming dish to a customer.

Clad in layers and a flat-brimmed hat, Han doesn't make it obvious that he owns the eatery (and several others). He remarks that his crew of three doesn't need him. But the modest restaurateur said he'll never be too proud to jump on the line to lend a hand.

At 32, Han has already spent five years filling gaps in the city's food scene. The proprietor of Dooby's, Sugarvale, Sundays and two forthcoming eateries is equal parts driven and grounded, bold but calculated in

*See HAN, page 6*



Phil Han, owner of Dooby's, serves up two Korean steak and cheese sandwiches to Sam Hooks at the Baltimore Farmers' Market & Bazaar.

KENNETH K. LAM/BALTIMORE SUN

## BALTIMORE DINER

# Macarons in spotlight at Fells Point pastry shop



SARAH MEEHAN/BALTIMORE SUN  
Sacre Sucre, a new pastry studio in Fells Point, will specialize in macarons, eclairs and small cakes.

French cookies will incorporate fresh fruit and chocolate ganaches; eclairs also available

BY SARAH MEEHAN  
The Baltimore Sun

A new pastry shop in Fells Point is bringing macarons and eclairs to Baltimore.

**Sacre Sucre** is on track to open in late April at 2001 Fleet St. in the storefront that previously housed Baltimore Cakery and Fleet Street Market.

The shop, owned by Manuel Sanchez and Dane Thibodeaux, will offer macarons, eclairs, small cakes and teas.

The couple met in Baltimore, where they lived for several years before moving to the San Francisco area for two years for Sanchez's job. But after a trip to Paris and months developing recipes, they returned to Charm City in January 2017 intent on bringing their confections to Baltimore customers.

"We were always looking for something to eat, something sweet and there's really not much outside of ice cream," Thibodeaux said of Baltimore's dessert market.

Their 2015 Paris trip introduced them to macarons. ("The first real one," Thibodeaux said. "We've had some here and we've never liked them.") They said they were blown away by the fresh fruit and chocolate ganaches incorporated into them.

"That's what we fell in love with. We didn't realize this is what the cookie should be," Thibodeaux said.

They spent months painstakingly trying to re-create what they tasted in France, and eventually created a recipe that satisfied friends, co-workers and neighbors. It wasn't long before they started selling the cookies at farmers markets three times a

week.

Dessert competition was stiff on the West Coast, so they brought the concept back to Baltimore to open a brick-and-mortar shop.

**Sacre Sucre** — French for "sacred sugar" — will carry a dozen flavors of the meringue-based cookies. Six core flavors like chocolate, vanilla and salted caramel will be on the menu permanently, and other seasonal flavors will rotate on and off the list.

"We try to use as little flavoring as possible. Most places that do macarons, they do buttercreams and flavoring, but we use creams and butters and chocolates and ganache with nuts and berries," Thibodeaux said. "If it's pistachio, it's going to have pistachio in it so you don't get that fake pistachio flavor."

The shop will also sell eclairs, small cakes, kombucha and tea. Macarons will cost \$2.25 apiece, with eclairs at about \$5 each.

"We don't want to make every

*See DINER, page 2*

# A flexible whole-grain salad

BY ELLIE KRIEGER  
The Washington Post

This vegetable-and-herb-packed whole-grain salad — whether it's warm or chilled — has a flexibility that comes in handy with the changeable spring weather.

Served warm, it has a comfort appeal that's welcomed on a colder evening; when chilled, it is filling yet refreshing, perfect for a sun-baked day. The recipe harnesses the heat of the just-cooked grain to temper the spinach and onion in the dish, toning down their rawness and softening them slightly. The grain itself is bulgur, a form of whole wheat that has been boiled, cracked and dried for a unique, mild-toasty flavor and quick cooking. You are probably most familiar with it as the grain used in tabbouleh, and this salad has a similar sensibility.

Bulgur comes in different-size grains, from fine to coarse. Any variety works here. You could also substitute another whole grain such as farro or quinoa.

After the mixture sits for a

few minutes in a bowl, a generous helping of fresh parsley and dill is added, along with a simple and reliably delicious dressing of extra-virgin olive oil and lemon juice.

## Bulgur salad with spinach, tomatoes and herbs

**Prep:** 30 minutes **Cook:** 15 minutes **Makes:** 6 servings

1 cup dried bulgur wheat  
5 ounces (2 cups) lightly packed fresh baby spinach leaves, coarsely chopped  
1/4 cup chopped red onion  
1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley leaves  
3 tablespoons chopped fresh dill  
1 cup quartered grape tomatoes  
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
1 teaspoon finely grated zest and 1 1/2 tablespoons juice (from 1 lemon)  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
2 ounces crumbled feta cheese (optional)

**1** Heat 2 cups water to a boil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Stir in the bulgur. Once the water returns to a boil, reduce the heat to medium, cover and cook until tender, 12-15 minutes. Makes: 2 to 2 1/2 cups.

**2** Combine the spinach and onion in a bowl. Fluff bulgur with a fork, then add it to the bowl, tossing until incorporated. Let the mixture sit until the spinach is slightly wilted and the grain is no longer steaming, about 3 minutes.

**3** Add the parsley, dill, tomatoes, oil, lemon zest and juice, and the salt and pepper; toss until well coated. Scatter the feta over the top, if using. Serve at room temperature, or chilled.

**Nutrition information per serving:** 130 calories, 5 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 21 g carbohydrates, 1 g sugar, 4 g protein, 125 mg sodium, 5 g fiber

The salad is lovely and light just as it is, but it is also wonderful with a sprinkle of salty feta cheese. Serve it with roasted or grilled poultry or meat, or as a vegetarian

main with the cheese or a handful of toasted nuts for protein.

*Ellie Krieger is a registered dietitian, nutritionist and cookbook author.*



E. JASON WAMBSGANS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE; JOAN MORAVEK/FOOD STYLING

# Piquant pillows

## Beginner soup dumplings



LEAH ESKIN

*Home on the Range*

**Prep:** 1 hour **Cook:** 6 minutes **Makes:** 16 dumplings

Expert soup dumplings start with homemade broth and hand-rolled wrappers. This version takes a couple of shortcuts — and still steams up delicious.

1 tablespoon cold water  
1 teaspoon gelatin  
1/2 cup pork, beef or chicken broth  
4 ounces ground pork  
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger  
1 teaspoon finely chopped green onion  
1 teaspoon sugar  
1/2 teaspoon soy sauce  
1/2 teaspoon sesame oil  
1/4 teaspoon Chinese rice wine  
1 pinch each: salt and white (or black) pepper  
16 wonton wrappers (4 ounces total)

**1 Set:** Drop water into a glass measuring cup. Sprinkle with gelatin. Bring broth to a boil; pour over gelatin, whisking to dissolve. Pour into a small baking pan and chill until jiggly, about 30 minutes.

**2 Mix:** Meanwhile stir together all remaining ingredients (except wrappers). When broth is set, cut into tiny cubes or scramble to bits with a fork. Stir cubes into pork.

**3 Fold:** Set four wrappers on a work surface; brush edges with water. Settle 1 tablespoon filling in the center of each. Bring the four points of each wrapper up to meet in the middle, forming four pyramid-shaped dumplings. Firmly press seams together. Are these the 18-pleat round dumplings of soup-dumpling fame? No. Will they work just fine? Yes. Fill remaining dumplings.

**4 Steam:** Line a steamer basket with parchment paper or a few leaves of bok choy or lettuce. Settle in dumplings. Steam over boiling water until dumplings are cooked through, about 6 minutes.

**5 Serve:** Set one dumpling on a big spoon. Nibble or poke a small hole. Slurp out soup. Drizzle dumpling with sauce and down it.

**Dumpling sauce:** Pour 1/4 cup dark (chinkiang) vinegar into a bowl. Scatter with fine shards of ginger.

**Provenance:** Adapted from Imperial Lamian in Chicago.



JENNIFER CHASE/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

# A restaurateur 'always willing to try'

**HAN**, From page 1  
bringing fresh dining experiences to Baltimoreans.

"What'll always continue to drive me is that same level of personal interest, like, 'Do I really want to do this?'" said the soft-spoken serial entrepreneur. "And I think when you find business owners that are doing the businesses that they really care about and are passionate about, you're going to find a higher likelihood that they'll be successful with those."

The son of Korean immigrants, Han grew up in Lutherville-Timonium and went to the Gilman School before attending the entrepreneurship-centered Babson College near Boston. After graduation, he worked with plenty of bar and restaurant owners during a stint with an e-commerce team at Thrillist in New York, but it wasn't until he moved back to Maryland that he gained firsthand restaurant experience.

As his father, David Han, considered retirement, Phil returned to the Baltimore area to learn the family business: Triple C Wholesalers, which supplies coffee, groceries and other staples to convenience stores. Then 25, Han was dating his future wife, Jennifer, and had trouble finding casual restaurants where they wanted to eat; Baltimore lacked the breadth of casual dining he'd become accustomed to in New York and Boston.

"If you wanted to go out on like a date, you were spending like \$100 to \$150 per date. And that was it, it was like fine-dining," Han said. "We didn't really have this subsector of like fast-casual really taking off yet or the idea of casual dining."

Sensing the void, he wanted to open a more laid-back and lower-priced eatery — a space without pretense where customers could enjoy coffee, craft beer and cool vibes at an accessible price. But first he had to learn how to run a restaurant.

When he wasn't training at the wholesale company, Han worked at Atwater's in Catonsville.

"I could tell right away that he was enthusiastic, and the questions that he asked were questions about not how we make cup of



Phil Han in Dooby's, the cafe he opened so that Baltimoreans could enjoy fast-casual, relatively inexpensive dining, with a little Korean flavor eventually thrown in.

coffee — he was asking how to run the business," said Ned Atwater, Atwater's owner. "I knew there was a little more to Phil than the average person."

Han was never afraid to take on new tasks, Atwater said — an ethos that remains evident in Dooby's and Han's other projects.

"You can get really beaten down if you try things and they don't work, and I think one of Phil's great qualities is that he doesn't let that get to him," Atwater said. "It's like a pitcher going to the majors too soon: You can get beat up, but Phil seems to be handling it really well."

Inspired by Han's childhood nickname, Dooby's launched in 2013. Han took his time learning the preferences of Mount Vernon's customers. It took more than a year for Korean influence to show through at Dooby's; Han didn't think Baltimore was ready for kimchi fried rice or pork buns when the cafe first opened.

"We want to kind of incorporate a lot of those flavors that I

grew up with and let it shine in some of the food items that you have," Han said. "But there still has to be this sense of familiarity with the food so that if you're not expecting ethnic food, per se, you can come in here and be like, 'Oh, a rice bowl with a little bit of Asian-ness in there? Cool, I dig that.'"

Han launched another experiment in 2015 with Sugarlave (originally a pop-up called "The Hatch") around the corner from Dooby's. The place has grown into an intimate and popular neighborhood bar.

Both exude the welcoming service Han said was part of his upbringing.

"Maybe this is part of Asian culture, where the sense of like constantly wanting to serve and being hospitable — I think that actually comes through, and it's a very kind of genuine experience," Han said.

He's since helped pilot Light City's Asian street food section, and he pitched the idea for the

Harbor Market at McKeldin Square.

"Phil is just really good at seeing what's happening in other cities and what's working and obviously wants Baltimore to grow and be the best city it can be," said Megan Campbell, event manager for the Waterfront Partnership, which operates Harbor Market. "He just is always willing to try. I don't think Phil has ever told me 'no.' I mean that's evident with all the different things he's doing in the city."

Han's pop-up doughnut shop, Sundays, saw a brief stint at Cross Street Market and will close this month. But by the end of the year, Han will add two more eateries to his repertoire: Noona's Pizza in Mount Vernon, and a Bon Fresco location in the Candler Building downtown. The local chain was founded in Columbia by Han's father-in-law, Gerald Koh, and has locations in Annapolis Junction, Beltsville and Owings Mills.

As Han opens the Baltimore

Albert Koh, also plans to open another in Rockville later this year.

"My brother-in-law and I, we kind of represent what could be the future of this company and we both want to see what is kind of the standard moving forward for what Bon Fresco would look like," Han said. "That's always been more of like a personal thing for me, of me wanting to at least show that side of the family what I think it could be."

Han encourages his employees to pursue their passions, too. Dooby's now sells the kombucha Han's employee Lou Sitbon began making at home. And Noona's Pizza was a natural fit because of his team's experience making pizza.

When he's not bouncing between the restaurants, construction site visits and meetings, the Locust Point resident is likely doting on his wife and their 14-month-old son, Oliver. He lights up when he talks about the toddler, and says playing with him makes him forget about the world of restaurants.

Most days, he tries to beat Jennifer home from her teaching job in Howard County to prepare dinner. He said he strives for equilibrium between work and home life, and that balance keeps his businesses and his family at their best.

"If you become too immersed in one thing, you can't do either thing really successfully," Han said. "I always want to make my wife and my kid my priority."

After all, he said, his family will always be there; the restaurants may not be. He never intended to own a restaurant group, he said, which is why there's no umbrella company that encompasses his ventures.

Han's future could be in food — or maybe not.

"I don't think that I need to be defined, necessarily, by what I'm currently working on," he said. "So it'll constantly evolve, you know. As we get to grow, we get to see and get experience with new opportunities, and if that leads us down a different path, then that's totally cool."

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