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Good Eats & Good Will at Mission Street Food

BY JEANNE STORCK
PHOTOS BY JESSE FRIEDMAN

At 5:30 every Thursday evening, a crowd forms outside Lung Shan, a scrappy Chinese restaurant at 18th and Mission. They're not lining up for wonton soup or mu shu pork, but for a guerilla-style restaurant called Mission Street Food.

Think of it as kitchen improv. Anthony Myint, former line cook at Bar Tartine, wanted to flex his culinary muscles, but without a huge cash investment, starting up a restaurant was just a dream. So he got inventive. Last October, he noticed that the Antojitas taco truck at 21st and Mission stood shuttered on Thursday evenings, so he asked the owners if he could rent the space for a night and dish out his own dressed-up version of street food.

Since then, Myint and his wife, Karen Leibowitz, have moved the event indoors, working out a deal with Lung Shan where they use the restaurant space two nights a week in ex-



change for a share of the profits. Myint also invites guest chefs to take a turn at the stove; past evenings have included talent from Bar Jules, Boccalone, Serpentine, Slow Club and Orson. Myint has turned the tiny back kitchen at Lung Shan into a stage where inventive chefs can beta test new material in a low risk setting. For diners, the fleeting, one-night-only menus offer adventurous food at budget prices. The experiment has become so wildly popular that would-be diners now wait upwards of two hours in line for a spot at one of the first come, first serve tables (to the chagrin of many a cranky Yelp reviewer).

The night I attend, the guest chefs are Sara Miles and Paul Fromberg, both professional cooks who run the Food Pantry, a charity that delivers fresh groceries to over 650 needy families a week. The Food Pantry harvests from community and backyard gardens, so the

theme of tonight's dinner is "gleaned food."

In the faint glow of tabletop votives and twinkling strings of pink-and-blue Christmas tree lights overhead, my tablemates and I peruse the menu. Our first pick, the Pork Pudding, arrives on a standard issue industrial restaurant plate, but what's on it is far from ordinary. Bits of fall-apart pork that have been slow-cooked in milk, nutmeg, brown sugar and Golden Gate Park bay leaves nestle on a bed of polenta flavored with herbs foraged from the Mission District (\$10).

The Weed Tart (\$8) sounds a bit scruffy but shines through its lowly name with earthy flavors of farro and mushroom blended with a mix of wild radish, chives, dandelion greens and fennel picked on Bernal Hill. On the side: a relish of preserved lemons from the Richmond and mint from the Mission.

For dessert, nothing could be sweeter than a slice of Texas sheet cake (\$6.50) topped with

California walnuts and a dollop of Humphry Slocombe's Old Potrero ice cream — a drunken, creamy confection infused with whiskey from Potrero Hill's own Anchor Distilling.

Sweeter still, Mission Street Food now donates its profits (beyond food, labor and overhead) to food-based charities such as Project Open Hand, La Cocina, Groceries for Seniors and the Saint Anthony Foundation. Judging by the lines outside Lung Shan each Thursday and Saturday night, it looks like SF foodies like having their cake and sharing it, too.

» Mission Street Food

At Lung Shan Restaurant, 2234 Mission St
Thursday and Saturday, 6 pm to
midnight (The line starts forming
before 5:30; it's worth it to get there
early before the best dishes sell out)
missionstreetfood.com

