

Explore

- ▶ All events
- ★ Critics' choice

- Free
- Distribution point
- Top 100

Instagram feed

INSTAGRAMS tagged #timeoutshanghai



[See all](#)

Good for

- Couples
- G&L
- Groups
- Kids
- Outdoor Seating
- Wi-Fi
- Vegetarian

Jean-Georges and Marja Vongerichten on CHI-Q

The prolific restaurateur and his wife bring modern Korean to The Bund



published on 29 May 2014

Korean-American Marja Vongerichten never thought she'd open her own restaurant. But being married to prolific restaurateur Jean-Georges Vongerichten, one of the world's most acclaimed chefs, eventually led to an opportunity to partner with him on a project of her own. The just-launched **CHI-Q** at Three on the Bund combines the foods and flavours of Marja's birth country with

How did you first get the idea for opening CHI-Q?

Marja One of the owners of Three on the Bund had seen my TV show *Kimchi Chronicles* and she proposed the idea to do a restaurant with Jean-Georges and me together. I've always been so against opening a restaurant, just because I'm married to it. But after I saw the project was really going forward I got excited about it.

How would you describe CHI-Q?

Marja It's a modern Korean restaurant married to my staunch traditionalist flavours. It's really a marriage of the two of us: Jean-Georges' contemporary take plus the food that I serve at home to my family.

You've written a Korean cuisine cookbook for home cooks. How different was the process for developing restaurant recipes?

Marja I spent about three weeks in the kitchen at Jean Georges [the restaurant] in New York with Jean-Georges and his chefs and that was quite a process. I was creating new recipes while maneuvering between 75 cooks in the middle of service. I've worked in commercial kitchens before but not that hectic. That was quite a learning curve for me but we had a lot of fun.

What kind of food did you eat growing up?

Marja Up until age three I ate Korean food and then I was adopted by an American couple. With my adoptive parents, I ate typical American food: fish sticks, chicken fingers. My mother was a lawyer and my father a colonel in the Marine Corps; both of them were workaholics.

When did you first start cooking?

Marja As a kid, I'd always wanted a catering business, I thought it was so much fun. I started cooking at age 12 with things like packaged muffin mix and my parents were always so patient. They would eat my dry eggs and they would always encourage me to try again. At 14 I cooked Thanksgiving dinner for the whole dinner and I was really proud.

When did you first start eating Korean food again?

Marja After I found my birth mother. I hadn't had Korean food in 17 years. The very first day I met my mother she cooked all my favourite dishes from when I was three. I took the first bite, I think it was bulgogi or something, and this flood of memories came back. After that it was like each dish I tasted was just another memory explosion. For me, this woman, my mother, was a virtual stranger to me but tasting her food was my one true visceral connection to this culture. After that, I dropped out of college and moved in with my birth mother. I had to follow my heart, something was telling me to do it. I'm her only child.

So you learned to cook Korean from your mother?

Marja Yes, the first thing she taught me was seaweed soup, and that recipe is on the menu at CHI-Q. Later, my mother's sister came to America when I had my daughter Chloe and helped me take care of her for four years and also taught me to cook more Korean foods. Now my mom says I've surpassed her as a cook.

Jean-Georges, did you eat Korean food before you met Marja?

JG Korean food was very new for me. The first time I tasted kimchi was when we moved in together. I thought something died in the fridge but it was just kimchi.

Marja He was a bachelor; in his fridge he had yogurt and San Pellegrino...

JG And Champagne! But I learned to like the Korean flavours.

What have been the challenges of working together on CHI-Q?

Marja Actually it's been surprisingly great to work together in a professional setting. At home he can't cook when I'm cooking because I use every utensil in the kitchen and I'm messy which he can't stand. At home I hate it when he touches my dishes.

JG Yes, so when we did the training, I used the other chef [CHI-Q's head chef Bina Yu] to tell her things, I said 'Bina, can you tell Marja...' [laughs]. I just had Bina suggest things to her.

What have been your different roles in developing CHI-Q?

JG At a restaurant, consistency is the most important thing, but also the balance of the menu. There's a lot of pork and beef in the Korean dishes and I wanted to have more vegetables. For CHI-Q, Marja did a seafood soup and a kimchi soup that's vegetarian with

What have been your different roles in developing CHI-Q?

JG At a restaurant, consistency is the most important thing, but also the balance of the menu. There's a lot of pork and beef in the Korean dishes and I wanted to have more vegetables. For CHI-Q, Marja did a seafood soup and a kimchi soup that's vegetarian with mushrooms. The menu is probably 70 per cent Marja and 30 per cent from me, adding in my restaurant experience.

Marja Jean-Georges does this with his eyes closed, so I could really just come in and do the creative part, what I love to do best.

CHI-Q Second Floor, Three on the Bund, 3 Zhongshan Nan Yi Lu. [See full address details.](#)

Other users also viewed

1. Where to watch the dragon boat races 2014 - **Blog**
2. 100 best Chinese Mainland Films: the countdown- **Books & Film**
3. Best shops in Shanghai: The Full List- **Shopping & Style**
4. The 100 best Mainland Chinese films
5. Shanghai's best brunches- **Photo Gallery**
6. Dragon Boat Festival traditions- **Around Town**
7. Liquid Laundry- **Restaurants & Cafes**
8. Shanghai's best gyms- **Health & Wellness**
9. Dragon Boat Festival in Shanghai
10. Shanghai's best bars and clubs- **Shanghai for Visitors**

Competitions

Win 280RMB off a haircut at Sunny Style

Win a weekly pass at W Yoga

Win Will's Gym membership card

Latest photo galleries



DAFF #allaround us artists
Submissions from Shanghai-based artists for the fashion fair's campaign



May style file
Turn yourself into a painter's palette with this season's trend



Post-It confessions
You told us things you would never share with your mum and we heard it

[See more photo galleries](#)

Time Out interviews



Jean Georges and Marja Vongerichten
The prolific restaurateur and his wife bring modern Korean to The Bund



Andrew Garfield
The star of *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* takes you through his role in the film



AC Slater
DJ, producer and label boss AC Slater plays at this year's Strawberry Fest

[See more interviews](#)

Listen here



June playlist
Your audio guide to the month - from Twiggy Frostbite to Cracker



Pairs' last ever album
Check out the local fuzz rock duo's final LP



Hujia Huwei's Coasting
Listen to the locally-based rock band's new EP

[See more playlists](#)