

Lucky Lunar New Year Feast

Danielle Chang On Celebrations as a Way to Share Her Chinese Culture with Friends

BY CHERYL LU-LIEN TAN

LUNAR NEW YEAR PARTIES can be a festive occasion for everybody. Danielle Chang, founder of the LuckyRice Festivals, which celebrate Asian cuisine, sees them as opportunities to share her Chinese culture with friends.

“It’s very personal for me as an immigrant,” says the New York-based Ms. Chang, who was chief executive officer of Vivienne Tam before founding LuckyRice. “I’ve learned so much through my friends about Thanksgiving and Christmases, American traditions. This is an obviously fun way for me to share my culture through food and drink.”



Dumplings, dim sum and clementines are served. Bryan Derballa for *The Wall Street Journal*

HOW YOU KNOW HER

- Founder of LuckyRice Festivals in New York, Las Vegas, San Francisco and other cities.
- Was chief executive officer of Vivienne Tam.
- Founder of Xiao Bao Chinese, a Chinese language and cultural school in Manhattan.

While Ms. Chang has done large fancy cocktail parties for Lunar New Year, she prefers casual gatherings with her family.

“It’s a big slumber party where we stay up until midnight and make dumplings,” she says.

For such small gatherings, Ms. Chang advises creating “one big dish that everyone can gather around.” Dumplings can be the star of the show, especially since they are considered a “lucky” food. “They are the shape of old golden ingots, so wrapping and eating them brings prosperity,” she says.

Sometimes, Ms. Chang turns to a hot-pot dish, which is easy as well as communal. She sets out a mixture of meats and fish and greens, some of which “have symbolism for Chinese new year” such as “noodles for long life,” she notes. The interactive nature of it—which requires people to put the ingredients they’d like to eat in the hot pot—can provide entertainment.

A dish Ms. Chang likes to serve is *yu sheng*, which is a tossed Chinese salad of more than a dozen ingredients, each of which is symbolic. Sweet ingredients such as plum sauce signify a sweet year ahead, while fish implies wealth (the word for it in Mandarin is a homonym for abundance). Everyone gathers around a large platter to toss the salad together. She says she likes to have people “participating in the celebration and contributing to the creation of the meal.”

She sometimes likes to mix it up. Dim sum isn’t a traditional Lunar New Year item, but the bite-size versions go “really well with cocktails and cocktail parties.” Sometimes she’ll serve snacks and sweets from non-Chinese cuisines such as Japanese mochi, or Japanese rice cake.

Ms. Chang also likes to experiment with cocktails. She often sets up a cocktail station featuring a large punch bowl holding a red drink, such as Bombay Sapphire East mixed with red grapefruit and amaro. “Traditional Chinese will drink baijiu [a



Danielle Chang with East New Cheer Punch at China Blue in New York. Bryan Derballa for *The Wall Street Journal*

sorghum-based Chinese spirit] but I like having that red bowl of goodness.”

For décor, she generally prefers to play with lucky red and gold hues in a chic way. She decorates food and other tables with gold-hued fruit such as clementines, mandarin oranges, star fruit and persimmons. Sometimes she will accent tables with bowls of goldfish. “People can take the goldfish home as a fun gift,” she says, noting she sometimes fills red envelopes with small amounts of money as part of the décor. “They can be like fun, mystery gift bags—people can pick them up and be surprised,” she says.

Ms. Chang sometimes creates a showpiece of nicely stacked fortune cookies. Vases filled with large branches loaded with cherry blossoms will round out the décor.

Finally, she considers her attire carefully. Red is a must and she often chooses to wear this in a *qipao*, which is a traditional Chinese dress. “I love wearing them even though it feels a little clichéd,” she says. The point is to “just have fun,” she says. “There can be so many rules to Chinese new year, I try not to enforce that on my guests. I just want them to get involved and be a part of it.”

NEW YEAR'S EVE DUMPLINGS

There is no “authentic” recipe for dumplings, as the ingredients and household preferences vary, says Danielle Chang. But in general, dumplings are made with pork, and Ms. Chang likes to add dried mushrooms and plenty of Napa cabbage. “We wrap these dumplings on New Year’s Eve at home with friends and family and then dig into them when the clock strikes midnight,” she says.

For the dough:

3 cups all-purpose flour
Up to 1¼ cups cold water
¼ teaspoon salt

For the filling:

1 cup ground pork
6 medium dried mushrooms, soaked in half a bowl of mushrooms before finely minced
4 tablespoons soy sauce
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon Chinese rice wine
¼ teaspoon freshly ground white pepper, or to taste
3 tablespoons sesame oil
½ green onion, finely minced
1½ cups Napa cabbage
2 slices fresh ginger, finely minced
1 clove garlic, peeled and finely minced

Stir the salt into the flour. Slowly stir in the cold water, adding as much as is necessary to form a smooth dough. Don’t add more water than is necessary. Knead the dough into a smooth ball. Cover the dough and let it rest for at least 30 minutes.

While the dough is resting, prepare the filling ingredients. Roughly chop the cabbage and place in a food processor. Pulse until finely chopped but not puréed. Remove and squeeze in a clean kitchen towel to remove juices. Add remaining stuffing ingredients and mix.

Knead the dough until it forms a smooth ball. Divide the dough into 60 pieces. Roll each piece out into a circle about 3-inches in diameter.

Place a small portion (about 1 level tablespoon) of the filling into the middle of each wrapper. Wet the edges of the dumpling with water. To wrap, place a tablespoon of filling into the center of dumpling wrapper. Wet the edges, and fold in half, to form a half moon shape. Fold the dough over the filling into a half moon shape and pinch the edges to seal. Continue with the remainder of the dumplings.

To cook, bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add half the dumplings, giving them a gentle stir so they don’t stick together. Bring the water to a boil, and add a half cup of cold water. Cover and repeat. When the dumplings come to a boil for a third time, they are ready. Drain and remove.

If desired, they can be pan-fried at this point. To pan fry, heat a nonstick pan over high heat. Add oil and swirl, then add the dumplings in one layer so that they don’t touch. Add water to come half way up the dumplings and cover. Cook over medium high heat until all water is evaporated and the bottoms are browned and crispy.

For a simple dipping sauce, mix equal parts soy sauce, sesame oil and rice vinegar.

HOT POT

Serves 10 to 12 people, family-style

This is really a dish that eaters can customize and make their own. There are tons of variations on this one-pot meal, and the beauty is that almost any combination of meats and vegetables (as well as sauces) work well. With this new year’s hot pot, I served a Taiwanese “sacha” based sauce made with a raw egg, but the hot pot will work well with different varieties of sauces, including a simple mixture of sesame oil and soy sauce or Japanese yuzu and soy. The same holds true with the broth. I primed my broth with blue crabs, ginger and scallions but chicken broth or a vegetarian version will work well, too.

For the table (*arrange all of the below in bowls for sharing*):

3 pounds thinly sliced meat (available at most Asian markets)
1 pound razor clams
1 pound little neck clams
1 pound fish cakes (I prefer white pollock balls)
1 pound rinsed mushrooms (shiitake, enoki and beech mushrooms work well)
1 pound rinsed greens (whatever is seasonal, in this instance baby Shanghainese bok choy and amaranth greens)
1 pound head-on shrimp
1 package mung bean vermicelli noodles (soak in cold-water for 30 minutes to soften, then drain before serving)

For the broth:

Six blue crabs (optional)
1 bunch scallions, rough-cut
1 knob ginger, rough-cut
3 quarts water, or enough to fill pot to about 2 inches from the rim

For the sauces:

½ cup Bull’s-Eye shacha sauce
1 raw egg per person
1/2 cup cilantro (minced)
1/2 cup green scallions (minced)
1/2 cup sesame oil
1/2 cup soy sauce
1/2 cup chili paste

Arrange all the ingredients in small bowls or platters. Have guests assemble their own sauces based on taste preferences, but a good rule of thumb with the sauces is to add one tablespoon of each to a beaten raw egg in a rice bowl.

Heat a pot of boiling water on a hot plate or tabletop gas burner. When the water boils, add the blue crabs, ginger, and scallion bunch to the water. When the water boils again, the hot pot is ready to go!

Dip each of the ingredients into the hot pot as you eat. Meat should be swirled in the hot water until it is just cooked, about 2 to 3 seconds. Dip each cooked item into the sauce before eating.

At the end of the meal, add the soaked vermicelli noodles into the broth until just cooked about 3 minutes). Combine the vermicelli and broth into small bowls and add leftover hot pot dipping sauces to taste.

EAST NEW CHEER PUNCH

6 oz. Bombay Sapphire East
4 oz. red grapefruit
2 oz. Ramazzotti (amaro)
4 oz. homemade Thai tea (lemon grass, vanilla, orange and white tea. steep 1 tablespoon of each in 1 liter hot water. Multiply for more.)

Shake all with ice.

Top with 4 oz. ginger beer and 4 dashes of Angostura bitters on top.

Garnish with large twist of grapefruit peel.

Serve in large punch bowl with large ice block. Pour into rocks glass.