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Gobi Mongolian BBQ House in Silver Lake

You've filled your bowl with meat and vegetables; now which of those 11 sauces to top them with?

By Jessica Gelt

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(Credit: Glenn Koenig/Los Angeles Times)

Saucing is a science at Silverlake's new **Gobi Mongolian BBQ House**. Modeled after a restaurant that co-owner Mike Buch went to as a child in Hollywood, Gobi has taken the low-rent, MSG-added Americanized Mongolian barbecue concept and given it a sunny, Facebook-generation makeover. A big part of that is a selection of 11 house-made sauces, including several that certainly weren't found in your parents' friendly neighborhood Mongolian BBQ hut, including lemon-mint, Asian pesto and smoked oyster.

The concept of Mongolian barbecue is simple: Grab a bowl, add vegetables, meat, noodles or rice, throw some sauce over it all and hand it to the man behind the giant flat grill and watch him cook it up with flair. Sounds easy, but at Gobi the trick to creating what is essentially a perfect bowl of glorified stir fry is in the execution of your sauce selection.

"Most people just jump right in there," says Buch. "They'll progress nicely through the buffet and then they'll get to the sauces and they'll stand there for two or three minutes doing nothing." That's when Buch will intervene and make a suggestion. With 11 choices, the combinations are many, and there are a few handy guides posted that lay out mixtures that the owners like.

But still—should you add two spoonfuls of spicy sauce or one? Do you want lemongrass, lemon-mint or standard lemon? Will the Asian pesto go well with the garlic oil sauce? Then there's ginger, always use ginger, Buch says, adding that the only real mistake a person can make while experimenting is under-saucing.

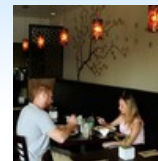
But beware of over-saucing too. The nearly 20 vegetables offered at Gobi are wickedly fresh and crisp. Whenever possible, more than a few of them, such as Mexican squash and sweet onions, are sourced from local farmers markets. (Buch also locally sources ingredients for the gelato he makes at his other Silver Lake business, the ever-popular **Pazzo Gelato**.) The meats—chicken, pork, lamb and beef—are all-natural and sliced razor-thin. Tofu is available for vegetarians, everything is MSG-free and the soy sauce is low-sodium.

In the diminutive restaurant with its dozen or so wooden tables and booths, small back bar, flickering tea candles and sage-colored walls, you'll also find a menu of delicious artisan ales as well as soju cocktails and a few red and white wines, including the always-fun-to-order Menage a Trois.

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But it's an apt selection because, at the end of the day, meat, veggies and sauce have always made for the perfect threesome.

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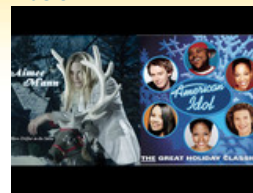
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