



The
Kitchens

DUMPLING SHACK GROUP

FEN
HAND PULLED NOODLES

DUMPLING SHACK



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Founded by husband and wife team, **John and Yee Li**, this business started as a market stall in The School Yard Market by London Fields, Hackney in 2014. With their heart still in the spirit of markets, they opened the first permanent, 7-day operation in Old Spitalfields Market in 2017, then a second location in South Quay in 2020, and Spring 2022 will see a return to Hackney with the company's third location.

Within the Dumpling Shack Group there are three brands – Dumpling Shack, Fen Noodles + Sichuan Fry – each with their own identity, but strong synergy and in conversation with each other. These brands have grown out of research, experimentation and the tastes of John and Yee.

Dumpling Shack started from John's desire to eat his favourite dumplings from Hong Kong, particularly inspired by a restaurant called Cheung Hing Kee. The dumplings were shengjianboa (pan fried soup dumplings) and he struggled to find them back in London, particularly on the street food scene. From this idea – what John thought would be a hobby – Dumpling Shack began, trading once a week at The School Yard Market. He added wontons to the menu and over time his confidence grew, as did a loyal following, and it became a full time job with the opening of Dumpling Shack at Old Spitalfields Market.

“Old Spitalfields Market was somewhere we always thought it would be good to be, but this was a scary leap – preparing enough food for seven days was daunting. Those first six months were stressful, transitioning a hobby into a profession” John says of the experience.





One of the key changes was to think about the crowd, which was an office lunch crowd and therefore needed a bit more choice. Before opening at Spitalfields, John and Yee had been travelling around China trying as many dan dan noodles as possible. Although it wasn't a noodle they had grown up eating, it was a favourite of theirs and they wanted to experience as many styles as they could; dan dan noodles has a long and varied history. They decided this would be a good menu fit for the new space, as well as a changing specials menu.

The introduction of hand-pulled noodles into the **Dumpling Shack** specials were sold on afternoons after the busy lunch rush, when they had time and space to pull them. From that, **Fen Noodles** was born as their popularity outgrew the space they had; "**our noodles are a homage to Xian Famous Food, the company in New York that popularised Xian cuisines and specifically biang biang noodles in the US**" John says. The most popular dishes are the cumin beef noodles and the skewers. On the menu at all the sites are also great vegan options, such as vegan dumplings in spicy sauce and potato and mushroom skewers cooked on their charcoal grill.

Sichuan Fry started as a pop up, which garnered two hour long queues for their fried chicken sandwiches, and so the idea of something more permanent seemed a natural next step. This led to finding the venue in Hackney, back to where it all began. Because of the lay out of space, they also realised that they could operate as a Dumpling Shack as well, with some of the favourite dishes such as the pan fried pork soup dumplings, spicy dan dan noodles, spicy wontons along with some new additions including shallot sauce noodles and cold noodle salads.



JOHN LI, founder + owner

Before Dumpling Shack John worked in finance at the Bank of China in the securities trading services department in Hong Kong from after studying Politics at Royal Holloway and then completing a law conversion with BPP Law School. He returned to London and worked at a boutique investment bank as an M&S analyst, whilst starting Dumpling Shack's Saturday stall.

Restaurants run in the family; John's parents moved to the UK from Hong Kong as teenagers and met whilst working in John's paternal grandfather's restaurant in Hounslow. John grew up in Caterham, Surrey where his parents ran a Chinese restaurant, which they opened in 1984, and it is still open and is now owned by his eldest sister. Whilst studying he would help out at the restaurant, and when he moved back to London - and working in the City and opening Dumpling Shack - John still went back to his parents restaurant on the weekends to help out.

YEE LI, founder + owner

Like John, Yee also grew up around the professional food space. Yee is from Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, where her parents ran a takeaway restaurant, a place she too has worked at over the years.

Yee worked at the Bank of England, before pursuing a baking profession in 2016, when she baked the macarons at Yolkin. A self-confessed carb fiend, she loves cakes and Asian breads and baked goods, a passion she developed after studying design and food technology in secondary school.

The pair met at Dumpling Shack's London Fields' Saturday stall, where Yee started helping out. Yee and John run the business together, they got married in 2020 and had a baby girl in 2022.





FLAVOURS + INFLUENCE

Both John and Yee's parents are Hakka Chinese, and they both grew up eating Cantonese style cooking, along with Hakka dishes.

"A typical dinner meal would start at 5.30pm just before the restaurant opened for dinner service. Our parents would cook a few dishes; for example steamed fish, some sort of stir fried greens (pak choi, kai lan), egg and tomato, pork belly and taro stew. We would all sit together and eat as a family before clearing the table and getting the restaurant ready for opening time at 6pm."

John explains the food he grew with.



In the Dumpling Shack Group there are also strong influences from Sichuan. John explains that it is in opposition to the food he grew up with, where Cantonese cooking is unlikely to utilise strong flavours such as chillies and Sichuan peppercorns; **“I would copy my older sister and load up my food with chilli oil”** John says, and this is what drove him to explore these big punchy flavours. One of his favourite places in Hong Kong was a Sichuan restaurant called Sijie, which is how he fell in love with the region and it was the food that he and Yee explored when they travelled in China, in particular going to Chengdu.

Both John and Yee like to play around with ideas and test out various dishes. In the beginning this was done in John’s parents kitchen, with his mother helping out (**“I dragged her in!”**). It is constant work and practice of folding dumplings, changing the recipes – listening to what the customers liked. It is a honing of a skill set, and things like hand-pulled noodles is a technique that takes hours to learn, to get the dough right is key. **“There are no shortcuts, it is very intensive work, this is important to understand.”** John and Yee are also very clear to not claim to be experts or to stake claim on what they do; it is a constant evolution and it is about respecting the work and making things they find delicious.

“Everything we sell to our customers is food we love to eat, and cook. Shengjianbao in our opinion is the ultimate dumpling – whisper this quietly, but we think it beats the steamed version (xiaolongbao). It’s a dumpling that could be eaten as a snack but given its size it is also substantial enough to be a meal. We love the contrasts of the dumpling, the fried crispy bottom, the steamed slightly chewy top with the savoury meat filling and soup inside the dumpling.” John says.

HAYDON WONG, development chef

John and Yee constantly want to grow and develop, as a business and also their menus. To do this is also about having the right staff, and they are very keen to give credit to the team they have.

Key to Sichuan Fry is their development chef Haydon Wong. Haydon also comes from a Chinese takeaway background, he was a CDP at XU and Bao before joining the Dumpling Shack Group. He takes traditional Chinese ingredients and techniques and marries them with a very modern take on cooking. The team are confident that they are cooking one of the best fried chicken in the UK!



THE CLASSICS



Shengjianbao

Signature pork soup dumplings, this is what most people come for. It is a larger dumpling compared to its steamed cousin, the xiao long bao. Shengjianbaos are pan fried which gives the base of the dumpling a crispy texture, and it's filled with a savoury, soupy pork filling

Available in Spitalfields, South Quay + Hackney location

The Sichuan Classic

This classic sandwich is what fans will be most familiar with, spiced with Sichuan peppercorns, chilli's and coated in a sauce made from doubanjiang then topped with pickles using Dumpling Shack's smacked cucumber marinade

Available from Hackney location.





Wontons in chilli oil

One of the dishes from the The School Yard Market days, these classic wontons are coated in Dumpling Shack's mala chilli oil - which is also available to purchase at the various sites.

Available in Spitalfields, South Quay + Hackney location



Beef + cumin hand-pulled noodles

Fresh noodles pulled to order, mixed with slices of beef which are marinated in cumin, ginger, coriander powder and chillies.

Available in Spitalfields + South Quay location



Dan Dan Beef Noodles

Chewy alkali noodles, topped with spicy sesame sauce and, beef and pickled mustard greens.

Available in Spitafields, South Quay + Hackney location



Cong You bing

(crispy spring onion pancake)

These are hand made flat pastries with spring onions rolled through them. It's shallowed fried which creates a light, crispy and flakey texture.

Available in Spitafields, South Quay + Hackney location





DUMPLING SHACK GROUP

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