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DEPARTURES

THE CULTURE ISSUE



LIVING

SAVORY TALENTS



Danielle Chang regularly uses her custom lazy Susan for traditional Asian family-style eating.

Luck Be a Lady Whether entertaining thousands of people or just a few close friends, LuckyRice founder Danielle Chang draws inspiration from her Asian heritage. *by Joe Harper. Photographs by Paola + Murray*

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ON A WARM FALL AFTERNOON, Danielle Chang is in her garden picking the last of the season's sweet Japanese cherry tomatoes, which she'll use for our dinner tonight. The garden spans the entire rooftop of her duplex penthouse in New York's SoHo neighborhood, where she lives with her two young children. "The avenue is right over there, but you can't hear it," says the petite Chang in a bright red Oscar de la Renta dress. "I like to be in the middle of it all but away from it at the same time, like every New Yorker wants."

Chang, 47, is the founder of LuckyRice, a traveling food festival that celebrates Asian cuisine and its intersection with global culture through everything from talking panels to culinary classes. Chef David Chang hosted the first event, in 2010, under New York's Manhattan Bridge, where various restaurants served Asian and Asia-inspired cuisine out of stalls akin to the night markets of Southeast Asia. Past participants include masters of Asian cooking like Anita Lo and Masaharu Morimoto as well as Western chefs such as Daniel Boulud, Eric Ripert, and

José Andrés. "People would ask where I was from and when I would say Taiwan, they'd say, 'Oh, I love Thailand,'" Chang tells me in the kitchen as she slices through a marinated pork belly. She was born in Taiwan, but grew up living everywhere from Guam to California, eventually settling in New York after graduating from Barnard College. "It made me think it would be great to create a lifestyle business that properly reflects my heritage." LuckyRice has served more than 50,000 people at its events, and Chang notes that a majority of attendees are non-Asian. "I see it as a sign of success. I'm not just preaching to the choir," she says. Chang also

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Top: Okra and prawns prepped for the grill. Left: Cocktail hour with, clockwise from top left, Christine Wong, Hong Thaimee, Danielle Chang, William Li, Angela Goding, and Charles McMickens.

“This is basically peasant food,” says LuckyRice’s Danielle Chang, “but with luxury touches like truffle flakes and langoustines.”



From left: Dessert in the living room, which has sofas from Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams and a silk rug from Fort Street Studio; cakes from Lady M served on a cocktail table from Oly.

has an Asian food-travel show on PBS, *Lucky Chow*, which is currently airing its third season.

On this October night, she’s invited some close friends for a dinner to celebrate LuckyRice’s upcoming 10-year anniversary. She’s seeing them before she’s thrown back into the middle of it all: Throughout 2019, she’s producing five LuckyRice events dubbed “Night Market of the Future” in five different cities. “It’s going to be a great golden anniversary for us,” says Chang. She also hosts culinary trips exclusively for American Express Platinum Card Members—Shanghai in 2017, Thailand last year—and will do a third in Tokyo this fall. (See americanexpress.com/luckyricetokyo for details.)

Like any polite guest, I’d like to say how effortless Chang’s style of entertaining is, but this would be a disservice to the industry she and her LuckyRice team put into every detail. William Li, the former president of Ralph Lauren Home, is the executive director at Lucky Chow, a nonprofit arm currently expanding beyond the show. He’s on the lower

terrace grilling lamb chops, which were marinated overnight in 13-spice powder.

Meanwhile, LuckyRice creative director Christine Wong is at the custom Molteni&C dining table arranging food on its built-in lazy Susan: shredded ghost chicken with ginger, garlic, and red-chili oil; a medley of stir-fried mushrooms sourced from the Union Square Greenmarket; sweet-and-sticky pineapple rice served in the fruit’s rind. The look evokes a Tibetan sand mandala—and is every bit as momentary. “I was inspired by the mystical Shangri-La in the Himalayas, so I wanted to paint a fantastical dinner party around it,” says Chang as she hands me the pork belly on a rice cracker. She calls this her “XOXO double red pork belly” because she uses Rémy XO Cognac to get the coloring instead of the traditional Shaoxing wine. Many of tonight’s recipes come from her 2016 cookbook, *Lucky Rice*.

No one preparing the meal seems stressed or overworked. Instead, there is a sense of great joy in the activity. “Dinner is not going to feel fussy and

formal. It's going to be fun," says Li. Chang further explains that it's simply important to present plenty of food. "The worst possible thing is to not have leftovers," says Chang. "At most Chinese dinners, it's not rude to ask for a doggie bag or burp at the table—it says you like the food that much." Soon the guests begin arriving, and Chang hands out her Rémy XO old-fashioned. "Also, it's not rude to be drunk because you want to show the host that you're full and merry."

Guests of the night include Chang's longtime friend Angela Goding, the director of development at MoMA PS1, along with her partner, Charles McMickens, a restaurateur. "Danielle has had many lives before she did LuckyRice," says Goding, listing off Chang's past jobs as a curator at Jeffrey Deitch, an associate at Goldman Sachs, CEO of Vivienne Tam, and creating her own lifestyle magazine, *Simplicity*. "LuckyRice integrates all of the things that she was experimenting with before," says Goding. "She's finally found her path."

Other guests include Anne Hyun, an event planner with whom Chang collaborates regularly, most recently on a birthday party for Martha Stewart's grandchildren, as well as Hong Thaimmee, the Thai chef behind the beloved Thaimmee Table (formerly Ngam) in the East Village. Dinner begins, and guests spin the lazy Susan to pick at the grilled prawns in 13-spice powder, the Yunnan-style soybeans (sautéed with garlic, soy sauce, and Chinese chicken bouillon), and a salad with Sichuan peppercorns, which leave a tingly sensation on the lips. The conversation meanders from food ("This is basically peasant food, but with luxury touches like truffle flakes and langoustines," says Chang) to cultural humor ("This is so *Joy Luck Club*," says Li). It ends with Chang and Li toasting, "If you are what you eat, we're all a little bit Asian."

Dessert is cake from Lady M served in the living room, accompanied by Chang's daughter, Clarissa, playing flawless Chopin on the piano. The guests are sipping their drinks and eating the green-tea cake. The other two cakes, a banana mille-feuille and a mille-crêpes, are left virtually untouched. Everyone is stuffed and a bit drunk, per proper Chinese etiquette. Chang surveys the room with a satisfied smile. I glance at the cakes and ask for a doggie bag.