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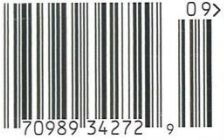
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KOREAN FUSION

# LUCKY STEAK

Restaurateur Steven Han forges a delicious new path with a Korean steakhouse in Pioneer Square

**STEVEN HAN'S** fourth restaurant, a high-end Korean steakhouse in Pioneer Square's new Stadium Place complex, is named after a divine creature in Korean culture that marks the arrival of good luck. Han established his reputation with Japanese restaurants (Momiji, Kushibar, Umi Sake House), but Girin, a massive, 125-seater next door to CenturyLink Field, is his first foray into the cuisine of his Korean heritage. Even a celebrated restaurateur can use fortuitous vibes when heading in a new direction, especially considering Han's executive chef, Brandon Kirksey, had zero Korean culinary experience when he signed on.

You'd hardly know it. At Girin, Kirksey, an Ethan Stowell alum (Tavolàta, Rione XIII) who was most recently at San Francisco's acclaimed Flour + Water, is mastering flavors and techniques outside his Italian repertoire. This is not fusion and it's not grandma's Korean, either. The dishes are smart and evocative, from the raw beef yukhoe with pear, pine nuts and egg yolk (\$15) to the rich egg custard known as gaeran jjim (\$10). Buckwheat noodles are made by hand, of course.

Flour + Water is known for its whole-animal butchery, so Kirksey, 30, was no doubt lured back to Seattle by Girin's in-house butchery program (and the restaurant's huge, street-facing meat locker). Each

week, the chef breaks down as many as two 200-pound pigs, and uses every last bit, which is evident in even the simplest dishes, such as a bowl of manduguk (\$13), where fat trim becomes the filling for toothsome dumplings swimming in a light pork broth (made from the pig's bones, natch) with mustard greens and featherlight rice cakes.

But the real pedestals for proteins, including melt-in-your-mouth, kalbi-marinated short ribs (\$36) and juicy grilled pork loin (\$28), are the ssam plates: generous platters of leafy greens and pickled or fermented veggies that you use to build wraps and top with banchan, complimentary side dishes (we inhaled the honey- and almond-flecked dried anchovies). By making ssams the centerpiece of its menu, Girin is celebrating the long, slow, feast-like tempo that

characterizes traditional dining in Korea. I found it ironic, then, that service, even early in the evening and in an empty restaurant, was swift. What was the rush?

Next time, we might try snacking in the full-scale bar. Girin is certainly a beautiful restaurant, from its spa-like entryway garden and babbling pond to the dramatically high ceilings and natural wood accents. But, the giant dining room—which takes up the majority of the restaurant's 5,400 square feet—sort of swallowed us up. Maybe catching a Sounders game in the handsome bar while nibbling on ssam plates at a fraction of the price during the daily happy hour (restaurant, 4–6 p.m.; bar, 4–7 p.m.) is the lucky way to go. *Pioneer Square, 501 Stadium Place S; 206.257.4259; girinseattle.com* **JESSICA YADEGARAN**

The ssam plate at Girin feature kalbi-marinated short ribs and grilled pork loin with fresh wrap-making ingredients

