



CHARLES PHAN; (BOTTOM) A WALL OF HONEY LIGHTS UP THE SPACE.

Open Door Policy

CHEF CHARLES PHAN IS TAKING OVER THE WORLD, AND WE COULDN'T BE HAPPIER.
BY KAREN PALMER

In 1995, when the Slanted Door opened on Valencia Street in the Mission—what was then considered to be an edgy part of town—no one would have dared utter the words “Charles Phan” and “food court” in the same sentence. Fast-forward to today: The jam-packed Slanted Door occupies a sweeping space in the Ferry Building, and Phan has opened not one but two informal joints, both called Out the Door and serving casual Vietnamese fare. The first, a take-out venture with just a few counter seats, is in the Ferry Building. The newer one opened late last year in a prime corner location of the Westfield SF Centre’s food court.

“Out the Door was actually the first concept for the Slanted Door, but we got sidetracked. I’d always wanted a fine-dining restaurant, and no one was doing classic Vietnamese food in a cool interior,” Phan says. “At the Westfield, we get a lot of people from out of town, so it’s a good way to test the suburban market.”



CRISPY DUCK IS JUST ONE DELICIOUS OPTION.

OUT THE DOOR
WESTFIELD SF CENTRE
415-541-9913

The new location’s design transcends the mall aesthetic: A long, narrow window covered with a sheet of streaming water provides a glimpse from the food court into the kitchen, where cooks stir-fry, working with huge, fire-licked woks. The take-out area gives way to a large sit-down dining room accented by what appears to be a wall of glowing stained glass. (In reality, it’s made up of permanent panels filled with over 60 different honeys; they’re not there to be eaten, but to display the many shades of

amber that will crystallize over time.) There’s even a small retail space, which Phan is planning to transform into a wine bar.

Despite the modern amenities, Phan is keeping it casual. Seated on slate-gray banquettes under high ceilings, diners are presented dishes lickety-split on modern plates. “We’re trying to dispel the notion that sitting down for lunch is going to take more time than taking out,” Phan says. The menu selection, more extensive than at the original Out the Door, reads like the Slanted Door’s greatest hits: Spring rolls and green papaya salad are included, as are more-substantial dishes, such as pork vermicelli, crispy duck and lemongrass-perfumed fried tofu with rice.

Despite his growing restaurant empire, Phan isn’t resting on his laurels: He has a third Out the Door location slated to open this summer in Pacific Heights, and possibly more to come. “We started from nothing, and it keeps growing and changing. We’ve made money, we’ve lost money,” Phan says. But considering that Out the Door in the Westfield has been packed since day one, we’d wager the future is looking very, very good. x

