



## Jonathan Gold & Roy Choi Talk Food Trucks at UCLA Panel

UCLA hosted a food truck discussion panel on February 15 featuring such food industry giants as Jonathan Gold of *L.A. Weekly*, Roy Choi of the [Kogi Truck](#), and Cathy Chaplin of [Gastronomy](#) blog as well as the creative geniuses behind the [Coolhaus](#) and [Frysmith](#) trucks. The talk explored the role of food in our notoriously mobile city. In fact, the first drive-thru window was brought to us courtesy of the In-N-Out in Baldwin Park. Food critic and panel mediator Jonathan Gold described the food truck as an extremely successful “third place,” a haven outside of our home and workplace where we can engage in leisurely activities like meeting with friends. It is this social aspect that he believes has contributed to the popularity of food trucks, making them a trend to stay. A few other notable points were made by the panelists:

### **Roy Choi of Kogi Truck: Spirituality in Taco Form**

Though you wouldn't know it from his casual and modest demeanor, Choi spearheaded the food truck phenomenon three-and-a-half years ago with his Kogi truck, symbolizing L.A. culture through Korean-Mexican fusion food served out of a vehicle. He described starting his business as a spiritual epiphany, where the truck “came to him.” The creative process was quick and painless, mostly because he veered away from over-thinking his tacos into yet another haute cuisine trend and let them become exactly what they needed to be. He took his tacos to the streets, focusing on his young followers and tweeting his location as he traveled from fenced car lots to late-night club scenes (be warned though, Kogi will never venture to East L.A. out of self-proclaimed respect for the taqueros' turf). Ultimately, Choi believes that street food and culture in L.A. cannot be defined yet, and that kids will determine its future.

## **Freya Estreller and Natasha Case of Coolhaus: Conceptual Masterminds**

After studying architecture both as an undergraduate and graduate student, Case was itching to share her knowledge and education with the world. Eventually, she realized that because people react very differently when food is involved, ice cream sandwiches would be an effective platform to convey her experiences. Estreller, the businesswoman of Coolhaus, defends their concept from haters as well as from New York competitor Mister Softee's threats by stating that despite low barriers of entry, natural selection does occur among food trucks.

## **Cathy Chaplin of Gastronomy: L.A. Can Learn from Vietnam's Food Culture**

Chaplin made a point of differentiating the thriving and unregulated Saigon food culture that she is intimately familiar with from L.A. food culture, which is neither thriving or unregulated. She sees Asian food trucks as revolutionary, however, because they are letting go of traditional brick-and-mortar businesses and heeding instead their ambitions towards the bigger picture.

## **Erik Cho and Brook Howell of Frysmith: "We Are Not a Health Food"**

Cho identifies his personal cultural history first and foremost with his mom's burger shop. Loving food from such a young age is the driving force in his operation.

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