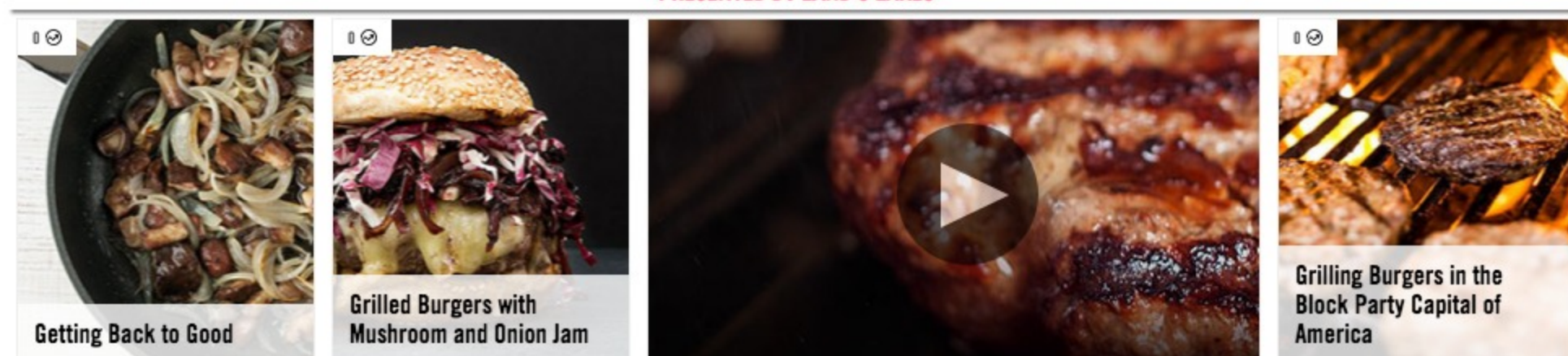


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LIFESTYLE

THE OTHER KFC

The secrets behind a Koreatown favorite.



Twice-fried sweet-spicy chicken has long been a favorite in Korean homes and eateries. Nineteen years ago in a small shop in Gumi, South Korea, a restaurant owner named Kwon Won Kang added his own savory garlic-soy dressing to double-fried wings and drumsticks, and the specialty known as yangnyeom dak (Korean fried chicken) took off as a fast-food phenomenon. Today, the business Kwon founded, called Kyochon, has more than 1,000 outlets worldwide, and Korean fried chicken has a global following, most notably in the LA area, where Kyochon has six branches. The most popular one stands in a strip mall on West Sixth Street, in the heart of Koreatown, a neighborhood just west of Downtown. The district is dotted with other Korean fried chicken specialists, places like Chicken Day, with its signature 27-ingredient sauce, but Kyochon is my favorite.



Photo: André Baranowski

KOREAN FRIED CHICKEN

Double-frying chicken wings gives them a delicate, crackly crust that is the hallmark of this popular Korean specialty, made famous in this country at the Los Angeles restaurant Kyochon.

The restaurant's popularity is no surprise. Its wings and drumsticks, served on platters in the brightly lit fast-food shop, are unfailingly juicy inside, crunchy outside, and glazed with one of two delicious house sauces: hot-sweet and the garlic-soy. A totally addictive food, it's lighter, less salty, and less greasy than American-style fried chicken. The key, I found out during a recent visit to Kyochon's kitchen, is in the precision frying, which entails steps that are unfamiliar to most Western cooks.

When an order came in, a cook took a batch of unseasoned wings and drumsticks—pared from small, fresh chickens and chilled overnight to decrease their moisture before frying—and dunked them in a thin batter of wheat flour, water, and cornstarch. Then he gave the wings and drumsticks a nine-minute sizzle in a deep-fryer containing 356-degree canola oil, which cooked the meat and formed a light crust. Next, he tossed the chicken in a wire strainer to shake off loose bits of fried batter before plunging it into a second fryer, which, I was told, contained oil left over from the previous day; the darker oil gives the skin a deeper flavor and hue. Three minutes later, the chicken emerged with a delicate texture and crackly crust. Finally, he brushed on one of the two sauces, which are packaged by Kyochon in Korea. "Only five people know the recipes," a cook told me, but I peeked at the label on a bag of the hot-sweet version; it contained soy sauce, red pepper concentrate, garlic, sugar, ginger, and two other ingredients that made me feel at home in the global fast-food world: strawberry jam and "soda pop." (See [** Korean Fried Chicken**](#).)



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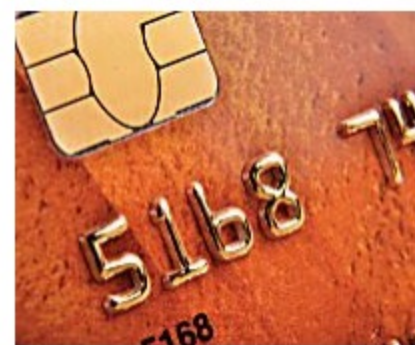
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