5 Boroughs, 1 Feast

Can The Deco be the answer to the what could — & should — be the nexus of NYC?

By Alex Harrell
Photography courtesy of The Deco Food + Drink

The Deco Food + Drink is Doris Huang's love letter to New York. Unintimidated by the male-dominated culinary landscape, her vision to elevate the traditional food hall concept into an experience that tells the story of NYC's history through food and design is alive at 231 West 39th Street.

But how does a Harvard undergrad with a Wharton MBA leave a senior position in global strategy at Godiva — with zero experience in hospitality and real estate management — write such a letter?

Well, *someone* had to. Why not Huang?

"All I knew was that it just felt like a need that nobody was meeting here," she said. "Because I experienced the need, I know it's real. It's crazy that New York is such a good food town, but in the neighborhood that's in the cen-

ter of everything, you don't have access to any of that."

When Huang set out to build The Deco, she had one specific design vision in mind: New York. Just as its look focuses on the city, the vendor curation needed to honor the best of the five boroughs culinarily. One thing Huang realized, by a natural outcome of her creation, was that every single owner/chef is either an immigrant or the child of immigrants.

"It wasn't a specific thing I was looking for," she said. "I wouldn't say the chefs tout their food as authentic in a folksy way; I didn't want that to be the case."

While the vendors do honor traditional recipes, it's a kismet result of the vision Huang had and those who pushed into a reality.

Here's a taste of what to expect:

Antojitos Caseros
Bronx-based Antojitos El Atoradeo introduces this concept at The Deco while including the staples it's known for: handmade tortillas and authentic Mexican recipes passed down from the owner's mother, Denise Lena Chavez, as well as his grandmother and aunt.

Beach Bistro 96
The first vendor to sign on was a married couple who did (and still does) model for the likes of Theory and Joie. "With being in the fashion industry, they have relationships here and understood the potential," Huang said. The couple started with a spot in Queens' Rockaway area, but has since moved their authentic Brazilian fare exclusively to The Deco.

Huli Huli
Take a vacation on your lunch break. Huli Huli riffs on traditional Hawaiian barbecue: chicken roasted on a spit, marinaded with soy, brown sugar and pineapple juice — "What you would see on a road trip around Maui," Huang said. Did I mention the Dole Whip Soft serve machine?

Little Tong Noodle Shop
The contemporary restaurant that gained fame after opening in the East Village, Little Tong Noodle Shop launches its first Chinese breakfast, along with staples like mixian rice noodles — a rare find in Midtown. As of press time, Simone Tong is the only female chef at The Deco.

Mademoiselle by Maman
The two first kiosks are mirrors of each other: both named Mademoiselle by Maman. Making its debut, the daughter-concept of Maman will be serving coffee and baked goods out of one stall and savory tarts and French-style salads out of the other.
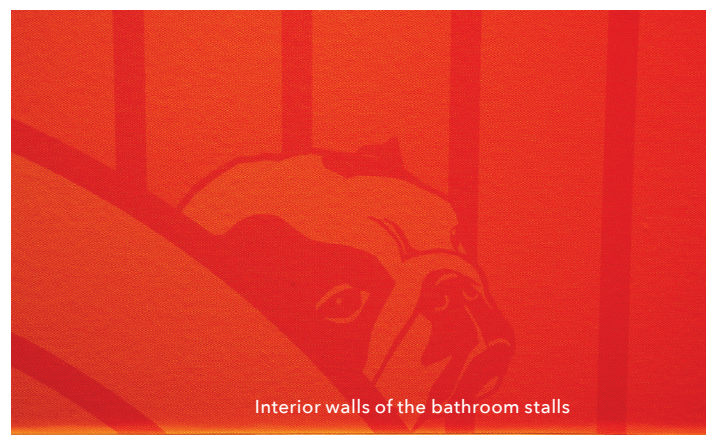
Mani in Pasta
"The name literally means hands in the dough," Huang explained, "which is where the inspiration came from." Known for its traditional Roman-style "al taglio" pizza, visitors can dine on an extensive lineup of pie variations, including the exclusive Pizza Deco featuring cacao and Pepe cream as well as truffles on an ice-baked dough.

Nansense
The latest addition to the Deco, Nansense brings Afghan comfort food to the table. "Middle Eastern was a gap we felt we needed to fill," Huang said of the cuisine. "T[he chef] is so passionate about the food he does, the heritage in his mom's recipes."

Papa Poule
An original concept by the Maman team, Papa Poule compliments Maman with heartier fare, including French-style rotisserie chicken with sides such as Brussels sprouts and potatoes — what Huang predicts to be a "workhorse" kiosk.

Interior walls of the bathroom stalls