



## CHARLES PHAN

Owner / Executive Chef, The Slanted Door



Born in Da Lat, Vietnam in 1962, Charles Phan and his family—parents and five siblings—left Vietnam after the war ended in 1975 and relocated to Guam. It was from Guam that the Phans moved to San Francisco in 1977. Being of Chinese descent, the Phans settled in Chinatown. Charles went to Mission High followed, by University of California, Berkeley where, with his parent’s prodding, he studied architecture.

Nonetheless, Charles always had a passion for food. Once in the United States, both of Charles’ parents held two jobs, so it became Charles' role to cook for the family - ten in all, including his aunt and uncle. His personal flavor profiles stemmed from his mother's cooking. Speaking fluent French, Mrs. Phan's cooking knew no boundaries. Her French/Vietnamese cooking style consistently elevated simple Vietnamese peasant food to new levels. When time allowed, it wasn’t unusual for her to make a simple spring roll numerous times, changing the sauce ever so slightly, perfecting the recipe for dinner. Charles followed her lead. Along with Vietnamese favorites, Charles was charmed by the American traditions, creating elaborate Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday feasts.

Throughout high school, Charles bussed tables at The Coachman (an English pub owned by the Scott's Seafood proprietors), Mumm’s and Cafe Royale. As he became intrigued with cooking, Charles took notice of some of the more avant-garde Bay Area restaurants of the time. He credits Chez Panisse and Zuni Café for heavily influencing his food philosophy.

After college, Phan took over the family garment business. While designing clothing for his clothing store in Berkeley he stumbled over an opportunity to work in the software business and

soon got drawn into the early 1990s Silicon Valley whirlwind. With an opportunity to continue selling software in Hong Kong, Charles opted to stay with his family in the Bay Area and attempted to open a small creperie in a Tenderloin hotel. When the owner found out the crepes were to be Vietnamese the deal was off so Charles and his family set out to open The Slanted Door.

Tapping his design background, Charles' vision for the original restaurant was to create a stylish ambiance for traditional Vietnamese cooking. He wanted an ingredient-driven menu that changed often and relied heavily on California eating savvy. Phan knew there was nothing in San Francisco that combined all of these elements within the Vietnamese category. He commented at the time that, "Many of my staff thought I was crazy. I refused to cut any corners, use any bottled sauces or the typical Vietnamese crutch, MSG."

Phan proved through the phenomenal success with the original Slanted Door Restaurant that combining the Bay Area's sensibility for fresh ingredients with Vietnamese time-honored cooking techniques is a perfect marriage. More than fifteen years later, he continues to prove that showcasing farm-fresh, locally sourced products and preparing everything from scratch has put The Slanted Door on the cutting edge of Vietnamese cuisine.