

## What's *Cooking*

# Downtown's Solomon's Delicatessen gets a global menu makeover, but keeps its heart in the Jewish deli

June 16, 2020 / BY [LEILANI MARIE LABONG](#)

([HTTPS://WWW.SACTOWNMAG.COM/BIOS/LEILANI-MARIE-LABONG/](https://www.sactownmag.com/bios/leilani-marie-labong/)).

On Saturday, June 20, Solomon's Delicatessen—named after Tower Records founder Russ Solomon and located in the K Street space once occupied by the iconic company's sixth-ever store—is celebrating its grand reopening. But take heed, fans of Jewish deli food: the hand-rolled bagels, the signature lox sandwich called The Russ, and the popular pastrami-on-rye sandwich, The Stanley, are among the few original menu items that have survived the quarantine. Welcome to Solomon's 2.0, where the old queue-up, fast-casual concept has turned into full service on fewer tables in light of social-distancing etiquette, and where, says restaurant partner Andrea Lepore, "Jewish deli meets California soul."

Drawing upon the Golden State's reputation as a global crossroads and Tower Records' international reach—at its peak, the Sacramento company had more than 200 stores in 15 countries—the [reimagined menu \(/wp-content/uploads/data-import/f474f09a/New20Solomons20Menu20620.pdf\)](#) at Solomon's has more of a worldly street-food vibe, as only a multicultural chef could deliver.



Half Japanese and half Mexican, chef Ryan Ota (formerly of Track Seven's The Other Side and the erstwhile Hot Italian, which Lepore founded in 2009) has channeled his dual culinary heritage into Solomon's newish identity. The Japanese potato croquettes—on the inside, a pillowy mixture of finely milled potato, bits of shiitake mushroom and scallion; the outside, golden and crunchy thanks to airy rice flour panko—are straight outta Ota's Sacramento childhood, namely the many hours spent with his grandmother at the Buddhist Church in the Southside Park neighborhood, watching members cook and develop new recipes for the city's annual Japanese Food Bazaar (canceled this year due to the pandemic). Solomon's croquettes are served with a housemade tonkatsu sauce of stewy-rich apple, garlic, tomato and cinnamon. Nicknamed "bulldog sauce," it's an homage to a century-old recipe belonging to a beloved Tokyo-based household condiment brand with a surly-faced canine mascot.



Ota considers the Argentinian empanadas an expression of his Hispanic heritage, and the version with the queso fresco and roasted tomato, redolent of cumin and coriander, hones in more tightly on his Mexican background. However, another variant features

smoked chicken, taking the savory South American hand pie in a Mediterranean direction with a spicing of za'atar and sumac, the prominent flavors in the house rub, made by local culinary boutique, Allspicery.

But like a true-blue American, Ota's personal vice is Southern fried chicken, a dish he studies like a mad scientist anywhere he can order it. For Solomon's take, he's skewed the soul food as far Japanese as it can go. The Sapporo features a chicken thigh fried "hapa style" with a rice- and AP-flour coating. The crispy patty is then pooled with bulldog sauce, slathered with kewpie aioli, topped with sunomono pickle and then stuffed between two slices of slightly sweet Japanese milk bread, made in-house—along with bagels, pita, focaccia-like fugazza and any other miracle of flour and water—by baker Emily Mallari, formerly of Pushkin's Bakery and the Golden 1 Center. "That fried chicken sandwich is me in food form," says Ota.



Tied to the eatery's Jewish heartstrings is a traditional Shabbat snack, The Sabich, a pita filled with hummus, grilled eggplant, pickled egg and feta cheese salad. Lepore likes to pair this one with Tel Aviv Lemonade, made with a kosher citron liqueur called etrog.

Such rare international spirits—others include slivovitz, an Eastern European plum brandy, and a Caribbean liqueur of ginger and clove called falernum—are a hallmark of Solomon's new bar program, helmed by bar director Tyler Allen, formerly of Fig + Farro in Minneapolis.

Lepore's favorite new dish is the one that Ota hopes will bring hardcore brunchers through the doors every morning. The khachapuri is a shallow, oval-shaped bowl of wood-fired dough, filled with feta and mozzarella that gets molten and blistered in the kitchen's new pizza oven before it's topped with a raw egg yolk. From there, the diner takes over the preparation at the table by whipping the piping-hot contents into a velvety cheese custard (the heat will cook the yolk). It's a dish straight from the Republic of Georgia's countryside, but Lepore has a more familiar take. "It's pizza!" she says, laughing.

**Sat-Sun. 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Wed.-Fri. 11:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. 730 K Street. 916-857-8200. [solomonsdelicatessen.com \(https://www.solomonsdelicatessen.com/\)](https://www.solomonsdelicatessen.com/)**

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