



LET'S GET TAKEOUT

## Pretty sweet: J-Petal's lovely Japanese crepes sweeten up State Street

By Victoria Davis, Special to the Cap Times Jan 17, 2021



The Fruit Island and Shrimp & Avocado crepes are among many sweet and savory crepe options at J-Petal, 511 State St.

RUTHIE HAUGE



By Victoria Davis, Special to the Cap Times

From coffee jelly and mochi ice cream to rice dumplings and matcha, aesthetics have always been essential for Japanese desserts.

Hand-held crepes are no exception. In fact, they are quite the show stoppers. Adorned with fruit and topped with ice cream, Japanese crepes are a cornucopia of “kawaii” — delightfully cute and wonderfully delicious. First emerging on the colorful streets of Harajuku in the 1970s, these folded crepes have now found a home on Madison’s State Street.

J-Petal opened for business at 511 State St. in Madison this past August, tucked between Taste of Sichuan and Chen’s Dumpling House. The crepe and Thai ice cream franchise began in Brooklyn, New York and has made its way across the U.S., with shops in Somerset, Massachusetts, Reston, Virginia, Gainesville, Florida, and Waco, Texas, more than 10 in all.



The Fruit Island crepe at J-Petal is filled with strawberry, banana, kiwi, almond, whipped yogurt and custard cream, topped with vanilla ice cream and two chocolate Pocky sticks.

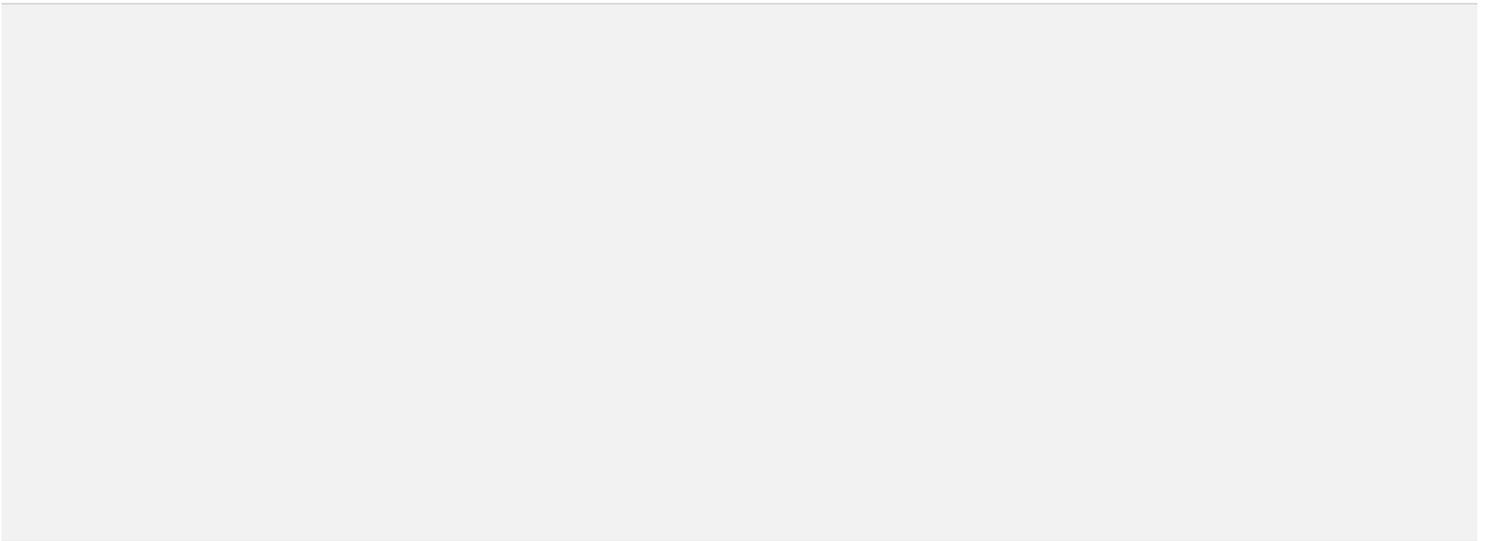
RUTHIE HAUGE

*[Comfort cuisine is flying out the door at Miller Family Meat & Three]*

At Madison's J-Petal, Yushen Chen and business partner Kira Wang meticulously build their culinary masterpieces.

"They are like works of art," Chen said about the crepes. "It's something new. When you think of 'crepe,' you think 'breakfast,' and just lay it on a plate. But ours are like flower-shaped burritos.

"Our generation is all about social media," Chen added. "These crepes make for very **Instagram-worthy pictures.**"



To make J-Petal's Fruit Island crepe (\$8.50), Chen begins by spreading batter on a large, cylindrical cast iron plate. He heats one side of the crepe for 30 seconds until golden brown, then flips it over to heat the other side for five seconds. On the shop's cutting table, he places carefully chopped bits of strawberries, kiwi and bananas in checkered patterns on one side of the crepe.



J-Petal co-owner Yushen Chen makes a Japanese crepe at his State Street shop, which opened in August 2020.

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A white yogurt cream and bright yellow egg custard covers it all like an umbrella.

“That way, every bite has a bit of cream and custard,” said Chen. To finish, Chen folds the empty side of the crepe over the fruit arrangement and rolls it all together into a cone, with strawberries, banana and kiwi swirled together like rose petals and poking out the top of the crepe.

With a dollop of ice cream, drizzles of chocolate fudge and Pocky sticks as the finishing touches, the Fruit Island is one of 10 varieties of sweet crepes. Others include the Matcha Chocolate Truffle (\$8.50), Berry Twist (\$8.25) and J-Petal Cocktail (\$8.75).

J-Petal's menu items also includes seven savory crepes, such as chicken teriyaki (\$8.50), shrimp and avocado (\$8.95) and Vegetarian Delight (\$8) with baby spinach, red peppers, string beans, grape tomatoes, Japanese mayonnaise and more.



Yushen Chen makes a shrimp and avocado crepe at J-Petal, which serves both savory and sweet Japanese crepes.

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Chen and Wang spent a week in Reston, training with J-Petal's original owner Jean Lin in the art of Japanese crepe making. Chen is from Fujian, China, and had never heard of Japanese

crepes before opening J-Petal's Madison location. It was his wife, Clara Yang, who had a vested interest in the idea.

“My wife really likes desserts,” Chen said. “And Japanese desserts specifically she just really enjoys. Japanese desserts are always really beautiful and are all about the presentation as well as taste, which was an appeal for me and Kira as well.

“When we first got to know J-Petal and their hand-held crepes, I thought, ‘Madison needs one of these.’”

***[Shaky grounds: Slowed by COVID, Madison coffee shops look for new revenue streams]***



J-Petal opened in August 2020 at 511 State St.

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Chen's foray into restaurant ownership meant "taking a detour" from his electrical engineering degree. It has been Chen's goal for the past five years to bring more Asian culture to Madison.

"My dad used to own two traditional Chinese restaurants in Fond Du Lac, so I grew up in that surrounding," said Chen, who immigrated with his parents in 2002, at the age of 10, to the U.S. from China. When he graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he worked part-time at a franchise location of Kung Fu Tea, eventually buying the business.

In addition to his boba tea spot, in July 2019 Chen also opened **Roll Play Cafe on State Street**. There, customers can not only indulge in Southeast Asian fusion food, they can also rent board games. (The cafe's on-site gaming has been on hiatus since COVID.)

J-Petal's sweet and savory crepes are all available to order online for pick-up and delivery. But the pandemic has been an obstacle for it, too.

“Our target customers are college kids, and it's a little tough,” Chen said. “Having been on State Street with my other businesses for so many years, I know what customer traffic has been like before. This year, schooling is mostly online and not many students are on campus. So it's been difficult to get J-Petal known. But we're building our base slowly.”

Chen noted that, in 2015, “there wasn't much” downtown when it came to Asian food. “Now you get so many different cultures walking down State Street.”



Yushen Chen owns J-Petal at 511 State St. with business partner Kira Wang.

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With his boba tea shop, Asian street food restaurant and crepe outlet complete with sparkling Japanese lightbulb drinks, Chen said he's putting a hold on any more cuisine exploration. At least for now.

"Three is a handful," said Chen. "We're just trying to focus on what's on our plate, literally and figuratively."

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## J-Petal

511 State Street

(608)285-5077

[jpetalmadison.com](http://jpetalmadison.com)

### HOURS

Monday-Thursday 11:30 a.m. - 9 p.m.

Friday-Saturday 11:30 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Sunday 11:30 a.m. - 9 p.m.



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State Street

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