

A TOSH of Home

The Old Spaghetti House banks on family recipes to become a household word

SPAGHETTI has always been a favorite Filipino comfort food, giving us a sense of family and familiarity. After all, who among us hasn't had this pasta dish for our first, seventh, 13th and 18th birthdays?

Its timelessness can be compared to the relationship of husband-and-wife team Lizzie and Chito Guerrero, who owns and runs The Old Spaghetti House (TOSH). The two have gone a long way from being next door neighbors, childhood sweethearts, a married couple and eventually, business partners.

With their background in the food business (she as assistant manager for Chateau 1771 in Malate, he as part of the family that owns Cravings Restaurant), the two decided to put up a small canteen that served as their training ground. That venture eventually led to Grilla in Antipolo, an area that the couple used to frequent when they were dating.

Four Grilla outlets later, the Guerreros thought of expanding their business. Finding space to rent in Katipunan, they decided on "top-of-mind" staples—comfort food that people have all the time. Why not spaghetti?

And why not bring it to a middle ground, thought Chito further. "The funny thing is, when you think 'spaghetti,' it's either you go premium, which means an Italian restaurant where you spend a lot, or you go to fast food chains. We wanted a middle ground, where diners can enjoy the same food quality as high-end restaurants,



August de la Cruz

Comfort food: Chito and Lizzie Guerrero offer up spaghetti with meatballs and Mama's Chicken Piccata (above, right)

without the expensive tab."

The venture eventually became a family affair, with hand-me-down traditional family recipes finding their way into the menu. This is a cooking family, after

all, Chito's mom Annie Pascual-Guerrero being the founder of the Cravings Group of Restaurants and the Center for Culinary Arts. Lizzie's side of the family made its contributions as well, and to

date, the menu at The Old Spaghetti House reads like a family almanac: there's Tita Ev's Vietnamese Garlic Spaghetti, Tita Wewi's Oriental Spaghetti, Mama's Chicken Piccata, Tita Nenette's Eggplant Parmigiana, and Mommy Annie's American Baked Spareribs and Parmesan Crusted Fish Fillet.

And like family, the prices are friendly, with the dishes ranging from P75 to P150 each. Says Lizzie, "When we say affordable, it doesn't mean we scrimp on the ingredients. This is home-cooked food, cooking the way we do in our house. So if we use olive oil and white wine at home, we also do so in the restaurant."

The family touch extends to the interiors, with diners made to feel like they're visiting grandma's house with its old tables, tiffany lamps, antique wooden panels, and period furniture.

That homey ambience coupled with good food and affordable prices has apparently worked. TOSH, now on its fourth year, has 16 branches in Metro Manila and will soon be opening its largest branch in Robinsons Place, Ermita this October. TOSH in Robinsons Otis, Nagtahan will open its doors in December. •

For its fourth anniversary celebration, TOSH is offering the "4 Plus 1 Spaghetti." Any order of four spaghetti dishes gets another spaghetti dish for free. Promo runs from Sept. 20-22. For details, call 687-6630 or 426-TOSH