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TRACKED

A Day in the Life of Lindsay Jang & Matt Abergel

The duo behind two of Hong Kong's most popular restaurants expands its empire



OF TWO MINDS | Restaurateurs Jang and Abergel talk shop in Hong Kong. PHOTO: RUBEN LUNDGREN FOR WSJ. MAGAZINE

By *Adam Robb*

July 26, 2017 10:57 a.m. ET

BY THE TIME the last of the empty highball glasses has been collected, Yardbird chef Matt Abergel and co-owner Lindsay Jang are already thinking about tomorrow. The restaurateurs, a former couple who are the parents of two young children, opened their no-reservations yakitori restaurant six years ago on what's become a booming stretch of Bridges Street in Hong Kong. Now, on this hectic June day, they're finalizing plans for the restaurant's new space, in a nearby converted warehouse.

Abergel and Jang, both 35 and natives of Alberta, Canada, first formed a friendship while working at a skate shop in Calgary. Career ambitions soon divided them, but they later

reconnected in New York in 2004 when she was a floor captain at Nobu Fifty Seven and he was a sous-chef at Masa Takayama's esteemed eponymous restaurant. Despite their early successes, they both longed to work for themselves. "When Matt was offered a position as executive chef at Zuma, it was clear for us all signs were pointing to Hong Kong," says Jang. Abergel helmed the *izakaya* restaurant for two years, and then in 2011 the pair opened Yardbird, which specializes in thoughtfully prepared yakitori, such as skewers of gently grilled chicken thyroid and plump fried chicken *katsu* sandwiches enveloped in milk bread. Over time, frequent guests—many of them fixtures of L.A.'s skate culture, now with their own brands and business on the Chinese mainland—have played a major role in the restaurant's growth. The graphic designer Evan Hecox is responsible for the Yardbird logo, and Vans made the staff custom shoes.



A Yardbird table setting. PHOTO: RUBEN LUNDGREN FOR WSJ. MAGAZINE

Two years after they started Yardbird, Abergel and Jang also opened a Japanese seafood spot, Ronin, which made its first appearance on the annual list of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants this winter. And they are currently planning their first stateside restaurant, Birdyard, set to debut in Los Angeles's Silver Lake neighborhood in late 2018.

When it opens this fall in Hong Kong, the new Yardbird venue will afford its owners two overdue necessities: ample bar seating and office space. Abergel will have the room to create a proper *mise en place* as he tests recipes for the Yardbird cookbook, out next year from Phaidon, and Jang will be able to focus on marketing their new

beverage company, Sunday's Spirits. After moving across the world to build their own success, it was only a matter of time before they bottled it.

Jang & Abergel By the Numbers

29 gallons Average amount of Snow Firefly sake that Yardbird servers pour monthly to toast with guests at the end of their meals.

Tracking Lindsay Jang & Matt Abergel

Follow a day in the life of the restaurateurs behind Yardbird.



7:30 a.m. | Abergel accompanies his and Jang's kids, Ronin Abe (front) and Lili Sunday, to school. RUBEN LUNDGREN FOR WSJ. MAGAZINE

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1,110 customers Estimate of diners served per week at Yardbird.

1 Sake Samurai The Japan Sake Brewers Association awarded the title to Yardbird's beverage director, Elliot Faber. He was the first Canadian-born person to receive this distinction.

5 sommeliers Number currently on staff at Yardbird.

50 chickens Yardbird's daily count of butchered birds.

90 minutes Average wait time to be seated at Yardbird.

33 Japanese whiskeys The different brands represented on Yardbird's shelves, including the restaurant's own distillation, Sunday's Japanese Whiskey.

661 pounds Amount of binchotan, a kind of charcoal used in traditional Japanese cooking, that Yardbird burns through in a month.

200 sweet-corn tempura balls Number served per day.

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