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GARY FRIEDMAN Los Angeles Times

It might take time to snag a table, but the extensive menu at Chengdu Taste in Alhambra will offer lots of possible rewards. Dishes can leave you comfortably numb.

Chengdu Taste

828 W. Valley Blvd., Alhambra, (626) 588-2284. 11 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. Mondays to Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Sundays. No alcohol. Street parking. Takeout. Cash only. \$

52 If your experience of Sichuan food is mostly from the Chongqing-style kitchens in the San Gabriel Valley, you will probably find Chengdu-style cooking lighter, cleaner and less likely to wake you up in the middle of the night with chile-oil induced nightmares. The food is flavored with a vast array of fresh, dried, pickled and ground chiles, but the vivid scent of Sichuan peppercorn comes to the front, and the sensation is of numbness rather than pain. Even a half-dozen visits aren't quite enough to exhaust the menu here — as soon as you check toothpick lamb, tea-smoked duck and garlic leeks sautéed with dense house-cured bacon off your list, you still have sliced fish with tofu pudding, flour-steamed pork and numb-taste wonton yet to try. It is almost impossible to visit without a taste of boiled fish with green pepper, a seriously addictive dish whose complex of chiles can make your lips buzz like a Las Vegas marquee. The wait for a table will be long.

Post & Beam

3767 Santa Rosalia Drive, Los Angeles, (323) 299-5599, postandbeamla.com. Noon to 9 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays, noon to 10 p.m. Thursdays to Saturdays, 5:30-9 p.m. Sundays. Brunch, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sundays. Full bar. Lot parking. Credit cards accepted. \$\$\$

53 If you follow restaurants in Los Angeles, you have known about Govind Armstrong since he was a teenage prodigy on the line at the original Spago. In Venice, his Willie Jane is the most accomplished Southern dining room in town. But it is probably Post & Beam where you find Armstrong at his best, a happy place of shrimp 'n' grits, buttermilk-fried chicken and sweet potato pie that may be the most ambitious restaurant ever to open in the Crenshaw district. If you want to understand the power structure of South Los Angeles, you could do worse than to eavesdrop over smoked-salmon hash and a bloody mary at Post & Beam after church on a Sunday afternoon.