



## Vietnam Restaurant Just Won the 2024 James Beard America's Classics Award

America's Classics honored the Vietnamese restaurant for having “remained a model of consistency for decades”

by [Ernest Owens](#) Feb 28, 2024, 11:28am EST

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With semifinalists already announced last month, the James Beard Foundation has revealed via press release the winners of its annual America's Classics award. This year, longtime Chinatown/University City gem Vietnam Restaurant, currently owned by Benny Lai, was recognized in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Per the foundation, the award is meant to honor “locally owned restaurants that serve quality food, have timeless appeal, and reflect the character of their communities.” Restaurants become eligible for the award once they've been open for 10 years.

### ***Here's what judges said about Vietnam Restaurant:***

*The Lai family was among the first wave of Vietnamese refugees who came to Philadelphia to build a life on hard work and entrepreneurship fueled by lemongrass-scented feasts. The founding couple, Nhu Lai and Thuyen Luu, fled Vietnam by boat with their eight children after being stripped of their sandal factory in 1978. After nearly a year in a Malaysian refugee camp, they arrived in*

*Philadelphia in 1979, began with a grocery, then quickly transitioned to a modest restaurant space in Chinatown in 1984. By 2000, after handing the business over to their son, Benny, moving to a larger multi-floor space next door, and undergoing a decor makeover evoking French colonial accents, the family secured Vietnam's place as one of Philly's favorite date-night destinations for classic Vietnamese cuisine. From barbecue platters laden with grilled meats, stuffed grape leaves, and Philly's crispiest spring rolls, to nuoc cham-splashed vermicelli bowls, fragrant noodle soups, lemongrass stir-fries, and clay pots sizzling with caramelized pork, Vietnam's kitchen has remained a model of consistency for decades. A second branch in West Philadelphia, Vietnam Café, has become a neighborhood favorite there, too, while the family's neighboring market, Fu Wah, has become a standard-bearer for its banh mi.*

Since its inception in 1998, this category has honored over 100 restaurants across the country. Honorees will be celebrated at the James Beard Restaurant and Chef Awards ceremony on Monday, June 10, at the Lyric Opera of Chicago.