

Hami Kim | Director of Research & Development | Paris Baguette | Moonachie, New Jersey



Photo Credit: Hami Kim

Now in Your Neighborhood: Plum Gochu Syrup at Paris Baguette

When Hami Kim first encountered The Perfect Purée at a culinary innovation session in 2025, she and her team at Paris Baguette had just finished developing a Korean BBQ theme for their spring menu. Hami, the Director of Research & Development at the multinational French-Korean bakery chain, says they were intrigued by The Perfect Purée's new line of **shelf-stable syrups** with unique, culinary-inspired flavor pairings.

Plum Gochu Syrup, a 2026 NRA FABI Favorite awardee, seemed like the ideal complement to the Korean theme for Paris Baguette's line of fresh mint lemonades. "I gravitate towards flavors that hit on multiple tastes, in this case, sweet and sour with a hint of spice," Hami says. "I loved the [Plum Gochu] flavor straight from the bottle even before learning that the heat came from gochu, the Korean pepper used to make gochujang. I knew immediately it would be the perfect fit."

In Paris Baguette's fast-paced café environment, the syrup's format mattered as much as its flavor. "Much like other fast casual establishments, refrigeration is often limited in front-of-house areas," Hami says. "Being able to keep the product ambient eliminates a step and alleviates the concern of shorter shelf life."

Bold Flavors, Familiar Favorites

As soon as it hit menus in early March, Fresh Mint Lemonade with Korean Plum Gochu became a customer favorite and a refreshing complement to the new savory Korean BBQ wrap, grilled cheese, and pizzetta. Building a bold, fusion-focused menu starts many months prior. Hami and her team are always searching the food landscape for flavor and culinary trends, social buzz, food and beverage

show findings, market research, and industry data. "Inspiration is everywhere!" she says.

Paris Baguette is rapidly expanding, with almost 300 cafes in North America and plans for 400 by the end of 2026. It ties elevated offerings to cafes with a friendly corner bakery vibe. "Our chefs are masters of their craft who can develop products that maintain lighter textures and balanced sweetness with familiar American flavors and formats," Hami says. "Our approach is to stay authentic to our heritage but in a way that feels approachable and relevant to any guest that enters one of our bakery cafes."

If the goal is spreading joy one coffee and croissant at a time, then Paris Baguette approaches external R&D partnerships with a shared focus on quality and innovation. Hami says beverages typically follow a well-proportioned ratio of ingredients for consistency and balanced flavor. Fresh mint lemonade with Plum Gochu Syrup was easy to develop but, like every recipe, it had to check some boxes before its debut. "Flavor-profile and appearance are paramount, but the complexity and ingredients are major factors," she says.

Curiosity Is the Best Teacher

Hami grew up in a large extended family with frequent gatherings around tables laden with plates of traditional Korean food. Some, like jellyfish salad and pig's feet, may have been ick-inducing but they taught her to try everything at least once — a valuable lesson for a culinary student. "Like it or not, you'll always learn something!" she says.

After graduating from Rutgers College and the French Culinary Institute, she took a non-linear path to her role as Director of R&D at Paris Baguette, something she wouldn't discourage. "It took many years and a circuitous route to reach my dream role, but I am truly grateful for it," she says. "The experience I gained working across different fields and departments gave me a perspective that I wouldn't have developed otherwise."

Hami's openness to new flavors and experiences keeps her tuned to the trends shaping bakery innovation. Paris Baguette introduced a limited summer menu last year to meet the Dubai chocolate trend, which Hami says is still going strong. "It has been fascinating to see the evolution of that product. Some of my favorites are multi-taste combinations (miso caramel, gochujang caramel) and temperature contrasts (einspänner)," she says.

Croissants are another canvas. They never leave the menu at Paris Baguette but they still spark creativity, just like lemonade. "They do

evolve with differentiated colors, flavors, striations and shapes bringing forth concepts that are visually striking with unique taste profiles,”
Hami says.

