

FOOD & WINE



Kung pao chicken is a staple of Chinese restaurants in the US. Photos: Dickson Lee



English breakfast udon at Koya Bar.

They're off to a frying start

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One of the best food trends to make its way across the Atlantic to London is the resurgence of breakfast. Restaurants open earlier and menus are a panoply of eggs, granola and porridges. Breakfast in the city has come into its own, with a slew of international restaurants now offering their own take on this quintessential English meal.

chef Ramael Scully. The small but perfectly formed breakfast menu includes these influences in its two star dishes: black rice and shakshuka.

The former uses a glutinous black rice from Malaysia cooked in coconut milk and served with palm sugar syrup, banana and mango; the latter is a staple Middle Eastern dish originally from Tunisia – braised eggs in a fiery tomato and pepper sauce with dollops of smoked labneh, a dairy product.

Dishoom  
dishoom.com

This Indian diner draws its inspiration from the "Irani" cafes of Mumbai that sprung up in the early 20th century and attracted people from all walks of life. Its bacon naan roll has reached iconic status, thanks to its baked-to-order naan, cream cheese and herb and chilli tomato jam filling and crisp and streaky smoked bacon.

Both are satisfying and a little off-the-beaten breakfast track. For traditionalists there's sausage or bacon sandwiches (served with a zingy coriander aioli), French toast or poached eggs with salmon.

Koya Bar  
koyabar.co.uk

(no reservations) Koya Bar opened next door to sister restaurant Koya, so that the latter's head chef, Junya Yamasaki, could give full rein to his more experimental streak and Koya Bar could focus on the traditional udon noodle dishes that made Koya famous.

For breakfast it serves simple Japanese and innovative Japanese-English fusion that are either rice or udon noodle based and highly original. These include the light and lean yakizakana, grilled fish of the day with rice, miso and pickle, the chicken keema but Japanese-flavoured kedgerie (rice porridge served with smoked haddock, poached egg and curry) and English breakfast udon, a broth that comes with bacon, shitake and a fried egg. This is the tidiest and heart-healthiest version of an English fry-up I've ever sampled.

Andina  
andinalondon.com

With its delicious menu and cool East London location, Andina is buzzing at all hours – even at 8am. My favourites are the Benedicto, a quinoa pancake topped with a poached egg, asparagus and haddock and an amarillo chilli sauce, and the quinoa porridge made with quinoa, milk, amaranth, purple corn syrup and seasonal fruit compote. Their fair-trade coffees are cheap and there's a strong list of smoothies and juices. Try the Supay, a kicky blend of orange, pomegranate, goldenberry and limo chilli.

Nopi  
ottolenghi.co.uk

Israeli Yotam Ottolenghi's London restaurants are an oasis of bright, fresh Mediterranean and Middle Eastern flavours. Here he has gone down a different route with a marble and brass interiors. More importantly, he's embraced Asian flavours, thanks to Malaysian-Australian head

Newman Street Tavern  
newmanstreettavern.co.uk

Weekend breakfasts were such a hit here that the venue launched weekday breakfasts a few months ago. With its best of British produce ethos and dedication to using every part of the animal, this airy two-floor restaurant offers the usual meat-and-egg suspects and a few more intriguing options.

Its signature dish is not for the faint-hearted – the full English is a perfectly cooked plate of Tamworth bacon and sausage, roast sucking pig, mushroom and black pudding (you can add an egg, too).

Other options are equally serious, such as the fried eggs, chorizo and fried potatoes, or flat mushrooms, fried eggs and chips. I tried the oatmeal-crumbed fried herring and a glorious helping of scrambled eggs followed by a bowl of fragrant poached fresh apricots sprinkled with toasted almonds.

Original spin

Fu Lu Shou's Westernised Chinese dishes have proved an unexpected hit, writes Vicki Williams

A Hollywood Road restaurant serving Westernised Chinese cuisine has become an unlikely success. Fu Lu Shou's menu highlights dishes that have remained classics for decades in Chinatown restaurants in countries such as Australia, the US and Britain.

A meal could start with prawn toast, move on to sweet and sour pork, honey prawns, kung pao chicken and chow mein, and finish with toffee apples and fortune cookies.

Cantonese cuisine is the origin, or inspiration, for many of the dishes that fall under this Westernised Chinese umbrella. But the dishes are defined by their source, as they have been adapted to suit non-Chinese palates by, for example, adding ketchup to a sweet and sour sauce. Some dishes are from the 1970s, the decade that revered sesame prawn toast.

In cases like chop suey, the dishes are not even found in China. This is food for people who can't find authentic Chinese cuisine, hardly a problem in Hong Kong.

Ping Lam was looking for a commercial property for her expanding nail spa business, when she came across a space that was formerly occupied by the private kitchen TBLS.

While it was not right for her original needs, she thought that the premises, with its rooftop terrace, was too much of a gem to resist.

She took the lease and decided to open a restaurant and bar, with the theme and cuisine concepts inspired by the building itself, with its

1970s and '80s interior design elements. On the surface this may sound like the whimsical thinking of someone with more money than sense. But delving deeper, Lam has the background of someone who knows something about success.

An instant hit since opening in May, there is no indication of her restaurant's popularity waning. It attracts a 50/50 mix of locals and expats of all ages and backgrounds, including A-listers and celebrities.

"When I saw the space, it

Some diners come back three times a week ... it must be food that they miss

PING LAM (BELOW)

seemed perfect as a venue for a combination casual eatery and rooftop bar. And because it was in an old Chinese building, with original design features, it seemed obvious to play with the theme of old-school Chinese," says Lam.

Lam grew up familiar with the Australian version of Chinatown cuisine.

She moved with her Hong Kong-born parents to Australia when she was two years old, settling in Sydney, where her parents ran a number of successful Chinese restaurants. She has been back in Hong Kong for about 18 months.

This background

came in handy in several ways. Her mother provided many of the recipes, such as the one for what Lam describes as a "kick-arse prawn toast".

Aside from the hip Asian-inspired cocktails and the rooftop, the nostalgic food is the main attraction for most Westerners and Chinese who grew up in the West.

The dishes remind them of the Chinese food they are familiar with, or fit the idea of what they thought Chinese food would be like before they came to Hong Kong. "The dishes we serve are comfort food for many of our diners.

"It is food that I missed, and as some of our diners come back three times a week, it seems to be food they miss, too," she says.

The menu is also a hit with a younger Hong Kong crowd who want to try something different, she says. Favoured dishes are the sweet and sour pork, hot and sour soup and fried tofu with spicy salt.

The fact it's a quality dining experience is part of its appeal. Lam prides herself on using good ingredients, taking no shortcuts, and using authentic cooking techniques. "For example, the prawn component of the sesame prawn toast is prepared in a traditional way, and it's all prawn. We also make our own stocks," Lam says.

Before starting a business, Lam had a high-flying career in corporate marketing and strategy, and she has applied those skills to her business.

Perhaps that will enable her to succeed where others have failed. In May 2008, Dining Wok opened, serving American Chinese cuisine.

At the time, a *Post* reviewer wrote that although there was a certain nostalgia in seeing dishes such as egg fu yung, Mongolian beef and mu shu



Fu Lu Shou serve "foreign" Chinese dishes such as The Boss' Honey Prawns (left).



sometimes signatures, in each of the countries where they continue to be served.

"I am presenting a taste of that. It's what diners who grew up in those countries want, and it is something new for those who do not."

She thinks the concept has merit beyond the novelty factor. Not content to rest on her laurels, she is introducing new cocktails this month [August], and is developing new dishes. "I believe in doing it right from the outset. I am a long-term kind of person, a thinker, a strategist, and I'm in this for the long haul," Lam says.

The restaurant's continued success in Hong Kong is not based wholly on the food. Lam says it is the combination of the food, the cocktails, the friendly relationship the staff have with customers and the space itself, that makes Fu Lu Shou unique.

Lam is not the only one who believes that the retro concept has long-term appeal – she has been approached more than once already to open the Fu Lu Shou concept overseas; for example, in New York. life@scmp.com

pork on a menu, "they're still second-rate versions of authentic Chinese dishes".

It received mixed reviews from the city's other critics, with comments about meagre portions and high prices, and closed in late 2009.

The perception that, in Hong Kong, the food would be thought of as a bastardised version of authentic Chinese cuisine is one of the factors Lam considered when developing her business plan. She admits her restaurant is not somewhere that you would eat every night, and it may not be for everyone.

But she thinks that it has its place alongside Cantonese restaurants here, even though it is not in competition with them.

"There is a certain amount of tongue-in-cheek thinking going on when developing the menu, which I intentionally made Westernised Chinese. These are dishes that have been around since the 1970s, and are considered favourites, and

Looking forward to a life behind bars

Charley Lanyon  
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As a pre-schooler Wallace Lau Wai-yip was already displaying the instincts of a mixologist. "Even before primary school, every time I'd go to yum cha with my parents I would mix the different sauces together and drink it," he says.

He also started collecting bartending books in secondary school although he claims he didn't know what gin and vodka were at the time. That didn't stop him from committing as many cocktail recipes to memory as he could, a practice that continues to this day. It's a practice that's just helped win a bartending competition.

Still, his career as a bartender was hardly assured. Lau went to university to study engineering and then worked in that field.

But even while working he couldn't shake the bartending bug, and studied cocktail

making in his spare time. "I thought work was boring and I wanted to do something to make me happy in my life," he says. When he hit 25, after two years of being an engineer, he decided to make a change. It was no easy task: "I had no experience, and 25 is not young in this industry."

First he worked at the Blue Lemon in Tin Hau, a low-key bar and cafe where he learned the basics, as well as how to make the kind of cocktails – gin and tonics, midori sours – that appealed to the local clientele.

After that, he took a job at the nightclub Play in Central. "I'd never worked in a nightclub; it was busy, crazy and loud, a totally different story," he says. Lau quickly got a handle on it: "You learn to get organised, work it fast, and handle all kinds of different people. It was a good experience."

Exhausted from long nights at Play, Lau decided to move sideways into the booming

wine industry, accepting a friend's invitation to go into wine sales. He learned about serving wine, how to taste it and serve it with food.

After nine months he was ready to get back behind the bar. He took a job at the Angel's Share whisky bar in Central. There, he says, everything changed. Lau met fellow bartender Bryan Chan Sun-lok, who became his mentor. "I learned so much from him not just about drinks and bartending techniques, but also about life. He's a kind person," he says.

His work at Angel's Share brought him into contact with bartenders working at Origin, and The Quinary, and he was introduced to the cutting-edge molecular mixology of Antonio Lai. His concept of what a cocktail could be started to expand.

Chan encouraged him to join the Diageo Reserve World Class Competition. "Thanks to Bryan's training, I got a very good result

in the first year." He was second runner-up in his first competition.

The competition reinvigorated him. "I wanted to learn more," he says. So Lau searched for different bars with something to teach him.

Lau worked briefly at Fatty Crab to learn New York-style cocktails before moving to Wyndham the 4th. "For industry people, it's a very strange place. Our boss wants you to do everything yourself. There are no guidelines here."

With this new experience under his belt, this year, he joined the Diageo competition again. "I was more relaxed," he says, "I didn't care about the results. I just cared about doing my best. I did what I wanted."

He proceeded to the final rounds with ease. But just before the last round, he had the bartender's equivalent of writers block. "I thought, 'I can't create."



The problem was that I had read too much."

Luckily, at the last moment the paralysis passed and he came up with the Skye-Line, a whisky-based sour drink that represents Chinese marriage.

Wallace Lau (right) and his Skye-Line cocktail (above). Photo: Inga Beckmann



He served it alongside two coconuts, a traditional Cantonese wedding symbol. The drink, he says, is inspired by his friends' marriages.

"The smoky flavour is like arguments in a marriage. The lemon juice represents jealousy. The bitters represent our bitterness, and egg whites are like communication. They keep things together, and make it smooth."

His winning cocktail presentation even included a fake wedding ceremony.

Now his ambition is to change attitudes towards bartenders. It's time they start getting some respect, he says. "People hear you're a bartender, and they think you just like to get drunk. But just like chefs, we bartenders are professionals."