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8.8

BEST NEW RESTAURANTS 2022

Pearl River Deli

CHINESE CHINATOWN

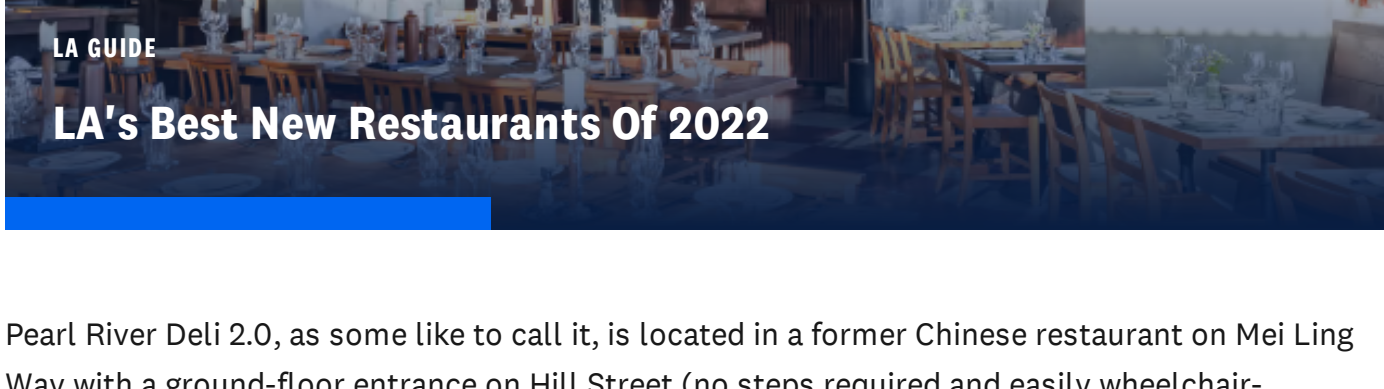
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KAT HONG JUNE 5, 2022

When we first wrote about Chinatown's Pearl River Deli in 2020, we bestowed—well, sort of forced—the nickname "Prince of Poutry" upon its head chef. We had just devoured a plate of his Hainan chicken and were hooked. Since then, the scrappy Cantonese-leaning spot has been busy: relocating to larger space in Chinatown, tinkering with and expanding the menu, and overall leveling up, evolving from a takeout spot to a full sit-down restaurant like a winning Shark Tank pitch come to life.



LA GUIDE LA's Best New Restaurants Of 2022

Pearl River Deli 2.0, as some like to call it, is located in a former Chinese restaurant on Mei Ling Way with a ground-floor entrance on Hill Street (no steps required and easily wheelchair-accessible). The corridor entrance is filled with red lanterns, like a moody scene ripped from a Wong Kar-Wai movie. There are a few wooden tables in the dining room along with a handful of basic chairs. You grab your own utensils and water is served from a cooler. It's informal, non-pretentious, and suitable for most any occasion. Bring your mom. Come with a date. Show up in gym shorts or the fanciest outfit you own and worry the entire time about spilling soy sauce. We've done it all. And Pearl River Deli has yet to fail us.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Each section of the menu (staples dishes, specials, and desserts) offers something different and blends elements from Chinatown's past and present. Zipping between cuisines, cultures, and generations, Pearl River Deli respects tradition in a creative and exciting way. If it's your first time, head straight for the Cantonese staples, like sweet-sticky glazed char siu and egg noodles that are springy but never brittle. Order the Macau pork chop, a show-stopping sandwich that arrives on a freshly baked pineapple bun brushed with a delicious layer of crystallized sugar that would make four out of five dentists visibly wince.

Those dishes alone warrant a high rating, but Pearl River Deli is just getting started. Specials appear weekly on the menu and then vanish almost as quickly (their Instagram is a good place to keep track). They usually take the form of lesser-seen regional dishes gathered from the vast Asian diaspora: Japanese breakfast sets, baked clay pot rice with fried tofu, Northern Thai khao soi, or Hawaiian-style plate lunches. These cuisine-spanning specials are the "deep cuts" PRD devotees live for. Is this what a Fairfax sneaker drop feels like? Because if so, we get it. Not every special is a winner (some taste more like works in progress), but they are never boring or unambitious.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Yet the most noticeable part of the PRD glow-up is its expanded dessert menu. Much like the weekly specials, desserts rotate frequently, which can feel fun and whimsical or absolutely maddening depending on your outlook. The lush, dairy-free coconut pudding or dark and hypnotizing nades may only be a brief romance, but as they say, it's better to have loved and lost than... not had dessert at all.

Our Pearl River Deli recommendation used to be "just order the Hainan chicken." But now, as a fully developed restaurant with a cozy, come-as-you-are energy and a clever blend of dishes, we'll use any excuse to visit. You should too.

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Food Rundown



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Macau Pork Chop Bun

You must order this. The pork chop bun is a menu mainstay and for good reason. It's a big ol' hunk of bone-in pork, deep-fried and plunked onto a pillowy pineapple bun with a sweet crust. It's slathered with the caramelized onions and mayonnaise laced with Maggi seasoning sauce, which adds a wonderful layer of umami.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Hainan Chicken

Warning: This is only a weekends-only special. You will not always see it on the menu. But grab it when you can. Luxurious cuts of poached chicken sit over a bed of savory rice that's been fluffed with chicken fat. The rich and nourishing broth it's served with—steeped with garlic, ginger, basil, lemongrass, and galangal—is more aromatic than a bottle of fancy Aesop hand soap.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Wontons in Chili Vinegar

These brain-looking pork dumplings come tightly wrapped in their wonton skins, and are a great start to any meal. The warm, juice-bursting bites sit in a lightly spicy chili vinaigrette and come in orders of four, either to share with the table or hoard for yourself.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Char Siu Plate

The wheel has yet to be recreated for a reason, and similarly the char siu at Pearl River Deli doesn't mess with tradition. An equal mix of fatty and lean parts, a cut of pork neck is roasted then glazed and sliced to create a supple yet cracking texture. You get a choice between noodles or white rice as a side. We prefer the egg noodles: bright yellow and thick strands that are springy like a brand new mattress.

Tenshondon

Very, very crab. If you're craving a one-way ticket to falling asleep while it's light out, order this special: fluffy crab omelet laid over fried rice that's made with three types of onions. Like all great comfort foods, it's smothered in a blanket of gravy for good measure.

HK Lemon Ice Tea

Arnold Palmer who? PRD makes their version of this popular Hong Kong drink from scratch and we love it. An extremely refreshing—and properly lemon-y and sweet—beverage option, this is an ideal complement to the many rich, salty dishes here.



PHOTO CREDIT: JAKOB LAYMAN

Desserts

The dessert menu at Pearl River Deli is like a lotto scratcher that never loses. One week, you might find a chocolate chip parfait: light, sweet, and 100% vegan. Or gluten-free chocolate chip cookies, a dairy-free coconut pudding, or strawberry shortcake bolo buns. There are usually two or three varieties on the menu and they're perfectly shortcake to enjoy yourself or split with a friend. Order all of them and never look back.

SUGGESTED READING

Needle CHINESE SILVER LAKE

Needle is an order-at-the-counter restaurant in Silver Lake serving Cantonese food.

Joy TAIWANESE HIGHLAND PARK

Located on York Blvd. in Highland Park, Joy is an excellent fast-casual Taiwanese spot.

Yang's Kitchen TAIWANESE ALHAMBRA

Yang's Kitchen is a modern Taiwanese restaurant in Alhambra with food that everyone needs to experience.

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