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NEW RESTAURANTS By Justin Fischer

Justin Ventura

Mr. & Mrs. Bund

★★★★★

I know this will be difficult for a lot of you to accept, but the sooner you come to terms with it, the better: Mr. & Mrs. Bund is not a sequel. But, make no mistake, Paul Pairet has his signature all over this place. Never one to play it entirely straight, you can still see the chef's amusing nudge-wink humor manifesting itself in every element of the restaurant. For example, order a large French fry (RMB50) and that's exactly what you'll get – one large fry. Likewise, servers wear neckties, elbow patches and Chuck Taylors. And the music? Two words: Crocodile. Rock. Yes, it's silly, but we get it.

However, in dramatic ways the menu diverges from Pairet's past. Some familiar classics remain, like his renowned prawn in a jar (RMB150-220), but otherwise the cuisine is decidedly more understated. And in spite of an overwhelmingly large and irritatingly floppy tome of a menu, we like it; it works.

This time Pairet is letting the food do the talking with homey dishes like the picnic chicken (RMB95). Tenderly char-grilled and served alongside a light whipped aioli — it really does taste like a picnic. Yet the restaurant maintains an air of luxury with the house-smoked salmon (RMB120), which is brought out on a trolley and prepared tableside. And plenty of inventive combinations abound, too, like foie gras with pomelo (RMB140) or mangoes seasoned with fresh dill for dessert (RMB80) — both perfectly balanced matches. And we love their steamed cod with olive oil lemon and soy; this buttery filet is so good it leaves little room for improvement (RMB190).

But it isn't just the menu that should draw you here, it's the whole package: classy without being pretentious, sophisticated without being complex and smack dab in the heart of the Bund. What more do you need? // Daily 6.30-10.30pm. Late night menu Tue-Sat 10.30pm-4am. All cards. 6/F, Bund18, Zhongshan Dong Yi Lu, by Nanjing Dong Lu (6323 9898) 中山东一路，外滩18号6楼，近南京东路.

Restaurant reviews

Urban Soup Kitchen

By Matthew Tom

★★★★★

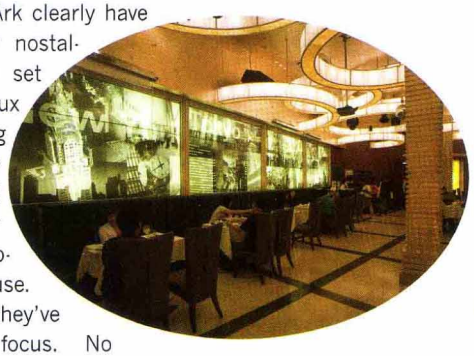
Justin Ventura

Given the state of the economy, this seems an unfortunate choice for a name. But Urban Soup Kitchen isn't just slopping up bread and boiled cabbage. In fact, much of the menu seems geared toward a gourmet palette. First, of course, there are the soups – an impressive selection ranging from shrimp bisque (RMB28/39) to minestrone (RMB18/25). Try their hearty and filling roasted pumpkin soup with chickpeas (RMB18). For solid fare, we recommend the smoked duck breast salad (RMB38) with mixed greens, roasted tomatoes and balsamic vinaigrette, or the roasted chicken sandwich (RMB33) with bell pepper chutney, red wine confiture and black pepper mustard dressing. But don't let the name fool you. These aren't soup kitchen prices, so we suggest the combo meal: your choice of a small soup and a sandwich (RMB40). And, by the way, don't worry. If you screw up your order, no one will make you go to the back of the line. // Daily 10.30am-10pm. No cards. No. 280 Madang Lu, by Zizhong Lu (5382 2978) 马当路280号，近自忠路

ARK Restaurant & Lounge Bar

By Apple Mandy

★★★★★



Justin Ventura

The owners of Ark clearly have a penchant for nostalgia. First they set up shop in a faux Chinese longtang (Xintiandi). Now they've moved to the third floor of an art deco-style movie house. But this time they've shifted their focus. No longer a live music venue, it's a fully-fledged Chinese restaurant. As expected, they've paid careful attention to the details. Floor-to-ceiling windows provide a spectacular view of People's Square. Service is polite, attentive and fast. As for the menu, expect classic Shanghai fare like warm wheat gluten with peanuts and black fungus (RMB18) — definitely worth a try. We also like their sauteed shrimps (RMB38) — plump, tender and, forgive the cliche, finger-lickin' good. You'll also find some standards from other regions, like their fragrant, subtly-spiced mapo doufu (RMB16). Perhaps not the spiciest we've had, but a worthy effort nonetheless. And considering the prices, you could do a lot worse in this part of town. // Daily 11am-10pm. All cards. 3/F, 248 Nanjing Xi Lu, by Huanghe Lu, (6327 7177), 南京西路248号，近黄河路