

RESTAURANT REVIEWS

Asia Opens Door to Continent of Cuisines

Chinese New Year menu offered throughout February at this Salisbury Township restaurant voted among top 100 Chinese restaurants

By [Joanna Poncavage](#) | [Email the author](#) | January 25, 2011

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An unassuming brick house along Susquehanna Street in Salisbury Township is a portal to another country – or several countries, depending on what cuisine Chef Alex Zhong has opted to highlight for his restaurant's extensive and ever-changing menu.

Asia offers hundreds of different dishes. Most are Chinese, including authentic dishes rarely found outside Chinatown or China, plus a significant sampling of Thai, Vietnamese, Korean and Indonesian fare.

Since opening in 2007, Asia has collected many national and local restaurant awards, and for four years straight has been named one of the 100 best Chinese restaurants in the U.S. I recently ate dinner there with a friend and experienced why firsthand.

Our Chicken Lettuce Cups appetizer (\$11.95) consisted of six slices of iceberg holding a mixture of minced chicken, chopped vegetables and thin, crunchy rice noodles. Topped with a choice of three sauces (ginger-peanut, basil-cashew or sweet and spicy Sichuan), they were cool, crisp and delicious.

We also enjoyed a large portion of Chef Alex's "Chinese" Kim Chi (\$4.95). "It's spicy," warned our server. "We like spicy," we assured him. The mixture of sweet and hot napa cabbage, carrots, garlic and onions glowed red with atomic bits of Korean hot chili peppers. It complemented everything that was to follow.

My dining companion selected one of the restaurant's signature entrees, Braised Lion's Head meatballs (\$15.95). Made of minced pork, water chestnuts and black mushrooms, the large meatballs were simmered in a five-spice soy sauce and served with steamed, whole baby bok choy. The barely seasoned greens balanced the hearty, savory meatballs perfectly.

Consistently disappointed by off-flavors and textures, I long ago stopped ordering seafood dishes from Chinese menus. Encouraged by Asia's reputation, I chose Hong Kong Style Pan-Fried Noodles with shrimp and scallops (\$16.95).

The bed of light, crispy noodles topped with mixed vegetables and seafood in the house soy sauce was large enough to share. The shrimp and scallops were excellent: firm, meaty and fresh-tasting. The flavors of the dish were enticing and elusive.

Our dinner for two (two appetizers, two entrees) was \$49.80, excluding tax and tip. Sweet, juicy orange slices and two fortune cookies were a perfect dessert, although more substantial sweets were available (honey walnut plantains, chocolate sesame rounds).

The following day on the phone, May Zhong confessed that the Hong Kong noodles dish was her personal favorite, but that even she doesn't know what goes into its house soy sauce. Her husband, she said "makes all his sauces at night after everyone has left. They are his secret recipes."

The "lion's head" meatballs are traditionally served at wedding banquets to symbolize good luck, explained May Zhong the next day. She and Alex had them at their own wedding in China as one of their entrees.

She was born in the United States and raised in Quakertown; he was born in China, where he went to culinary school. They met at a Chinese restaurant her mother managed in Montgomeryville, and opened their first venture, Oriental Gourmet take-out and catering, in Saucon Valley. They sold it after eight years, but have been working together all their married lives.

Throughout February, Asia will offer a Chinese New Year Menu of "good luck" foods in addition to its other bills of fare. Choices will include Whole Crispy Flounder (\$28.95), Seafood in Taro Birdsnest, a variety of special dumplings and sticky rice cake.

The Chinese character for fish is a homophone for "abundance," says May Zhong. "You want a whole fish because you want a lot of good fortune and health." The Crispy Flounder, she adds, large enough to share, is served with julienned fresh ginger and scallions with hot sesame oil and soy sauce. "It's very light with no heavy sauce," she says; "you really enjoy the fish."

Good to know before you go: Asia has several menus: a lunch menu, a dinner menu, a take-out menu and a special authentic Chinese menu.

"The Chinese menu used to be only for the Chinese customers," says May Zhong, but more and more Americans want to order from it. Some items such as jellyfish or pig's ears are not for the squeamish. Some, such as the Sichuan hot pot under a layer of red chili oil may be too spicy. But many, such as tofu noodles with pork and green chili are less exotic.

What's more, Asia is eager to accommodate any preference and will customize any dish. Or as Chef Zhong said as we said goodbye, "Maybe next time I'll make something special for you."

Asia

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