

DELICIOUS SA

Mum Cha dumplings – worthy of a premium price

Yum cha comes to the East End and, with a dedicated chef behind the scenes, is worth paying a premium for, writes Simon Wilkinson

Simon Wilkinson, SA Weekend

delicious.
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Head chef Kwan Yi at Mum Cha. Picture: Matt Loxton

The little slip of paper turned up in my wallet, tucked in next to the credit card, a reminder of the night before. Extracted from the hollow crescent of a fortune cookie after dinner at Mum Cha, its prophecy had seemed particularly appropriate given the mission at hand. “You are never selfish with your advice or help,” the red type reads, surely wise counsel for anyone about to write a column of this type.

Not that this dumpling house and drinks specialist needs all that much help or advice. With its owners and crew variously involved in establishments including [East End Cellars](#), [Amalfi](#) and [Mother Vine](#), this is one new venture you’d expect to hit the ground running.

That said, Mum Cha has moved into a location with its share of bad omens in recent times, firstly the ill-fated Iberia restaurant and then Jock Zonfrillo’s Italian bar and snackery Mallozzi, which survived only six months.

Between them they at least left behind the floor plan and furnishings to make the challenging three-level space work, with a bar in the basement, the ground floor no more than a landing, and the galley kitchen along one side of the mezzanine.

Around all this, the maximum seating – benches, stools, chairs, some more comfortable than others – is squeezed into the minimal space.

The first battle for Mum Cha will be convincing diners accustomed to laminate tables, bottomless teapots and pork dumplings at less than a dollar a pop that there is another way – that a properly made dumpling, dressed appropriately, can be gobsmackingly good, and worthy of a premium price.



Dishes at Mum-Cha. Picture: Matt Loxton

That responsibility lies with Kwan Yi (Connie) Ying, who grew up in Hong Kong where the yum cha tradition of snacks and tea (hence the cha) is part of daily life. After training in Adelaide and working in a variety of kitchens, Connie has been

executive chef at Mother Vine for the past four years (a role she still holds).

Along with manager Patrick Madden, she saw an opportunity to bring yum cha to the East End and present it with more finesse and a better drinks list than is usual over in Chinatown.

Her list of seven dim sum are crafted in different shapes and styles, and served with custom-made accompaniments, including high quality soy, vinegars and other sauces.

Even the standard prawn specimens, the curl of seafood a little lost in a stodgier style of wrap, bob about in a lovely fish and sesame oil broth that is spooned up long after the rest is gone.

Kwan Yi happily cherry-picks the dumpling traditions of different cuisines. The kimchi-filled mandoo comes from Korea, while the pork and cabbage potsticker is fashioned in the style of Japan's gyoza, but doused in red vinegar as they do on the streets of Hong Kong.

A mixture of lamb and chives is stuffed into wontons folded so their crinkled skin looks like the surface of the brain. They are drizzled in a chilli oil made specially to go with this combination (as opposed to the standard chilli oil, also house-made). A second plate of those, please.

The other standout is the XLB (xiao long bao) soup dumpling, the little pleated packages bursting to release a rich, pork broth. What kind of strange magic is this? The only dumplings to be served in a steamer basket, they also come with julienne of ginger and a smooth, complex aged vinegar.

Some won't stray beyond the dim sum, but Mum Cha also offers a selection of hot and cold dishes, as well as the occasional random item brought to the table, yum cha-style.

Instead, we nibble on meaty segments of pork ribs braised in a sweet master stock that is balanced by more of that aged vinegar. A slab of silken tofu is topped by a mix of finely diced century egg, fried shallots and peanuts, and sits in a pool of soy that has steeped with its own selection of aromatics. It's only \$8.50 but the care for detail is the same.

The most substantial dish is a chicken rice in which the perfumed rice, broth and sauces are all superb but some of the slices of breast meat have become dry and stringy. Kwan Yi says she would like to cook a more traditional whole bird but isn't sure how it would be received.

So I do have one small piece of advice for her... follow your heart.



Head chef Kwan Yi at Mum Cha. Picture: Matt Loxton

MUM CHA

279 Rundle St, city

8223 2210, mumcha.com.au

OWNERS Kwan Yi Ying, Patrick Madden, Michael Andrewartha, Frank Hannon-Tan, Pablo Theodoros

CHEF Kwan Yi Ying

FOOD Yum cha

SMALL \$5-\$14 **MAIN** \$14

DRINKS A short but carefully chosen selection of wine, as you'd expect from this team. Or stick with the yum cha tea tradition.

OPEN LUNCH and **DINNER** Tue-Sun

SCORE 14.5/20