

AS SEEN IN
NY POST

SOMETHING ASIAN

BIG, BEAUTIFUL AND boisterous, Tao has brightened considerably since the days it was known as the Plaza Movie Theater. Bursting with tu-

Restaurant Report

multuous chic young things, they come to scope out the flamboyant bar/lounge action, as well as the fanciful dining arena drenched in an atmosphere of Far-Eastern romance, starring a monumental Buddha. Still relatively

new, Mark Packer's (of Rue 57) Tao has obviously captivated a very loyal, staunch following. I simply don't happen to be one of them—though Sam Hazen who launched a stellar kitchen in Rue 57 is the executive chef here. This doesn't mean the food is unpalatable, but if I had my druthers I'd druther be eating in Rue 57 than Tao. Nevertheless, crowds relentlessly sip libations and scarf down Hazen's trendy Asian fare of the 21st-Century kind. Fundamentally the

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kitchen is uneven. There is a marshalling of Asian cooking that embraces offerings from China, Japan, Thailand, and Hong Kong, along with surprise specials. While the menu advises combining and sharing, I feel it best not to diminish the chefs efforts by juxtaposing too many diverse influences, but then the temptation to sample a broad selection can be hard to resist.

Appetizers: Chilean sea bass satay with vegetables; filet of BBQ roast pork; Thai shrimp; dumplings; spring rolls; lettuce-wrapped squab; dragon tail spare ribs; temple salad (not what you would expect); chicken satay served with an excellent peanut sauce for dipping. Most interesting of three soups is the velvet corn and crab.

Entrees: an exotic variety of chicken dishes; crispy, crackling Peking duck for two; hot stone

cooked beef with spicy dipping sauces, as well a Kobe and other steak offerings, some turning up the heat to meltdown; intricately cooked seafood; rarefied noodles and rice creations; a full range of sushi/sashimi; special rolls and specialty dishes.

Don't be put off by hot and spicy labels. They're not all that hot, and these can be some of the most complex dishes to be sampled here.

★★★ Tao, 42 E. 58 St., NY. (212) 888-2288. L & D daily. Dinner entrees \$14-\$39. Accepts res., major cc.

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WHAT THE ★★★ MEAN

- 0- Farkackt (Beneath contempt)
- 1- Unremarkable but acceptable
- 2- Good
- 3- Very good
- 4- Outstanding

FOR THE RECORD

Restaurant reviews in this column are in no way paid advertising. Restaurants are selected at Landwehr's sole discretion and praised or panned accordingly. Feedback is welcome. Write Landwehr at 823 11th Ave., NY 10019 or call (212) 956-1882 or check-out his web site @www.Sheldon_Landwehr.com; Email Sheldon@.Sheldonlandwehr.com.