

## David's Restaurant

4 Cecil Place  
Pahran VIC 3181

**Review Date:** 14 November 2009  
**Total Cost:** ~ \$60 per person  
**Attendants:** Michael Zheng & Pauline Banh  
**Official Rating:** 1 Chef's hat in The Age's Good Food Guide

### Review:

Traditional Shanghainese food has strong flavors. As a result of many years of eating such foods (I was born in Shanghai), I have come to prefer dishes which have distinct tastes, be it salty, spicy, sour or otherwise.

David's Restaurant claims to be "the soul of Shanghai". As it is rare for Chinese restaurants to be given official recognition, there was unabashed exuberance on my part to try this restaurant. Can this restaurant be authentic enough to feel like a piece of Shanghai had been transported to the middle of this affluent Melbourne suburb? Sadly, it falls short in some important areas which took away from its authenticity.

### Ambience, Cleanliness and Service

The general ambience of this restaurant is a pleasant mix of East and West. The décor is distinctly Chinese, but gone is the buzz of dialects in the background that usually pervade Chinese restaurants. The service is much more attentive than what can normally be expected from a Chinese restaurant, and the waiters even gave introductions to each dish.

What added to the experience is the excellent green tea. Good Chinese tea tastes stronger after a refill of the pot. This tea provided a rich flavor, at just the right temperature, and did indeed taste stronger after the first refill of the pot.

### Soups: Hot & Sour Soup + Double Boiled Duck Meat Soup

We began with the soups.

The Hot & Sour Soup satisfied the first part of its name, but strangely the sour taste was missing, replaced by a soy sauce-like saltiness. The soup had its own unique taste, but it was not as authentic as I had hoped.

The Duck Soup, though, was right on the money. You can clearly taste the duck in the broth and the slight gingery aroma (from the ginseng in the soup) provided a nice finish.

### Dim Sim: Steamed Pork Bun + Pan Fried Beef Dumpling

My favorite Shanghainese dish is the steamed pork buns, so this dish would probably make or break my experience at this restaurant. No pressure then.

The perfect steamed bun is one with soft thin skin that does not break easily. There should be tasty soup inside the bun, which virtually bursts out as you take your first bite. The only way to eat it without spraying yourself is to bite a tiny hole on one side and suck this soup out prior to taking larger bites. The pork filling should mix well with the vinegar, which is commonly used as the dip to provide flavor. David's steam bun is almost there, but the dough used to make the outer layer of the bun appeared a bit withered, instead of plump and juicy. It was also a little too thick, which contributed to the fact that it was a touch brittle and broke too easily. The soup inside was spot on and provided the desired experience. The pork filling was also terrific. It was a very good steamed pork bun, but unfortunately did not meet the high expectations that I had.

The Pan Fried dumpling was a little more disappointing. It was fried to the right crispiness, but beef filling is not suitable for these dishes, especially not mixed with vinegar.

#### Appetizers: Spring Onion Pancake + Shanghai Pork Belly

The Spring Onion Pancake should have tasted slightly salty with a crispy skin. This one had just about the right crispiness, but the salt was missing. Considering that it is usually eaten with congee, a sprinkling of salt is necessary to complete the experience.

The Pork Belly was top quality. Two layers of lean meat were interspersed between layers of thick glutinous pig fat that adds new meaning to the phrase "chewing the fat". Diners with high blood pressure could burst a vein after eating this dish. My only peeve with this dish is that the sauce could be stronger.

#### Cold Dish: Drunken Chicken

This was very tender and authentic. A quasi-alcohol taste lingered in the mouth after consumption, which was exquisite. The boneless meat topped by a layer of succulent skin was very smooth.

#### Main: 'Mock Crab'

The "main" dish of this meal was the Mock Crab. In real terms, it was egg white mixed with pieces of scallops and prawns. If I had blindfolds on, I would have believed that I was eating a crab dish. It does not have much flavor on its own. However, when mixed with the vinegar that was served with the dish, the flavors come out in a wonderful blend. Chinese people do tend to eat crab meat after dipping it in vinegar, and this dish certainly excels when the vinegar is added.

#### Dessert Platter: Pumpkin Cake + Almond Pudding + Banana Wonton + Red Date Rice Cake + Green Tea Ice Cream

This platter is highly recommended for first timers at this restaurant. My tip would be to eat the ice cream first; it melts quickly as it is served in the middle of four warm desserts. Each piece has its own

appeal, but my favorite has to be the Pumpkin Cake served with syrup. It was crispy, sweet and a delight to eat.

### Summary

We ordered dishes which provided an acid test for the authenticity of this restaurant. Unfortunately, it didn't quite live up to the expectations I had. However, there are two mitigating factors. The first is that I compared each dish to the best that I have tasted. It is not reasonable to expect one restaurant to be the best at making every dish. My expectations were therefore unreasonably high. The second is that my preference for strong flavors is probably not the norm in the context of where this restaurant plies its trade. I doubt many local Melbournians have the same acquired tastes as me. The overall experience was still very enjoyable and the price was also quite reasonable because we ordered more than usual (we skipped breakfast as preparation for visiting this restaurant).

### **Scores:**

Quality of food	=	5
Value	=	8
Service	=	9
Ambience	=	8
Cleanliness	=	9