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# Restaurants & Bars



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## The Monogamous Chinese

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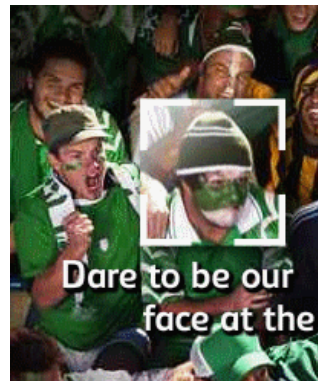
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Toss together two popular but unrelated strands of regional Chinese cooking, serve it in a decidedly modish space accessorised with pretty Oriental trinkets and set up the venue in the restaurant Disneyland better known as Soho. It sounds presumptuous but it'd be a lie to say that, at first, we weren't sceptical about this concept. But – sometimes – being too hasty to judge leaves room for error and, in the case of The Monogamous Chinese, being wrong never tasted more delicious.

Nestled under the Soho escalators, the restaurant touts itself as being loyal to traditional Sichuan and Peking flavours. Don't take this too literally, though – the chefs aren't opposed to reinventing the classics, nor are they impervious to influences from Shandong, Shanghai and even places beyond China. Ease yourself into the menu with a chilled starter of abalone mushrooms sandwiched between slivers of crisp cucumber (\$98). It's a clean and simple opener that's easily perked up after a quick dip in the accompanying wasabi-spiked soy sauce. Those who prefer bolder, flavour-flecked offerings should go for the deep-fried tofu (\$98). Highly recommended by the staff, these sun-kissed, golden brown blocks contain soft and supple curd centres that hold up well under the heavy heap of fried garlic and spicy salt.

Another spot-on, staff-approved item – pork spare ribs



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stir-fried in black vinegar sauce (\$138) – is simply addictive. It's messy, gnaw-on-the-bone fare that's given extra zip from a handful of tomatoes and pineapples that's tossed into the mix. And if you're looking to fill the dining room with the beautiful fragrance of sautéed mutton and scallions, shoot for the sizzling iron plate (\$138) and order a bowl of steamed rice on the side (\$18).

Representing the Sichuan portion of the menu, the 'dan dan' noodles (\$58) here are designed for milder palates and boast a disappointingly gentle heat. It's not a complete loss though: the fragrant peanut broth is still delicious, especially when draped over strands of thick and glossy homespun noodles. The restaurant's dumplings are also made from scratch and include boiled, pan-fried and steamed preparations. Go for the Northeastern variety, which are slippery, thin-skinned packets filled with a tingling mix of spicy pork and Chinese cabbage (\$78).

For proof that nonconformity can sometimes be a diner's best friend, get the chefs to whip up their version of Shanghai's staple, deep-fried soufflé balls (\$88). Made fresh to order, these are plumped up with vanilla ice cream instead of the customary red bean and banana filling and the result tastes like a fluffy, iced marshmallow encased in a light-as-air exterior.

Our only major complaint would be that cooked dishes arrive at the same time, making it difficult to enjoy everything at their piping hot prime. Apparently, there is such a thing as being too efficient. Overall, though, Monogamous reminds us that great food should be celebrated regardless of whether it stays close to its roots or strays far from its nest. And if you get to experience both sides of the spectrum – as you do here – then you're in for a really good time. *Dorothy So*

*59 Caine Rd, Soho, 2523 2872. Daily noon-3pm & 6pm-11pm.*

#### **The bill**

*Abalone mushroom with cucumbers \$98*

*Deep-fried tofu with garlic and spicy salt \$98*

*Pork spare ribs with black vinegar sauce \$138*

*Sizzling sautéed mutton \$138*

*Sichuan noodles in peanut soup \$68*

*Pork and cabbage dumplings \$78*

*Ice cream soufflé balls \$88*

*10 percent service charge \$70.60*

**Total (for two) \$776.60**

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