

Crispy Veal Sweetbreads, Baby Cucumber, Brown Butter Sauce



heat from fresh wasabi; the prawn crackers provided texture and a mellow flavor contrast. The Japanese Tai snapper *uzusukuri* got similar treatment with ponzu sauce and bottarga shavings.

Excitement built with the entry of crispy sweetbreads resting on a brown-butter emulsion so concentrated that it tasted like sweet plum sauce. What could easily be the chef's signature dish, the Hokkaido scallops *a la plancha*, accompanied by toasted shrimps and flavored with earthy shiitake mushrooms and a chestnut purée, was then brought to the table.

After that lesson in proper fusion, chef Mark showcased his mastery of techniques in well-executed classic entrées. The duck confit and the braised Blackmore Wagyu are designed to impress but not intimidate.

A popular option to end meals in Allium is the Laiskonis Egg—a delicate eggshell filled with chocolate pot de crème and caramel foam. Here, granules of Maldon salt lifts the flavors and opens up the palate.

What might be mistaken as safe by some seems more like a mature understanding of both the wants and needs of diners. Chef Mark allows a glimpse into his creative style, without neglecting to deliver a satisfying meal. He's a modernist that refuses to isolate, and I believe we do have room for that.

IN A NUTSHELL

ALLIUM G/F The Grand Midori, Bolanos Street, Legazpi Village, Makati City; tel. no.: 519-1088

MUST-TRIES Market Menu (P1,950++), Carte Blanche Menu (P3,800++)

THUMBS UP Presented as an option in the Carte Blanche menu, a proper wine and beverage pairing further enhances your dining experience.

SOUPED UP!

Din Tai Fung Philippines definitely lives up to the hype.

REVIEW BY SASHA LIM UY

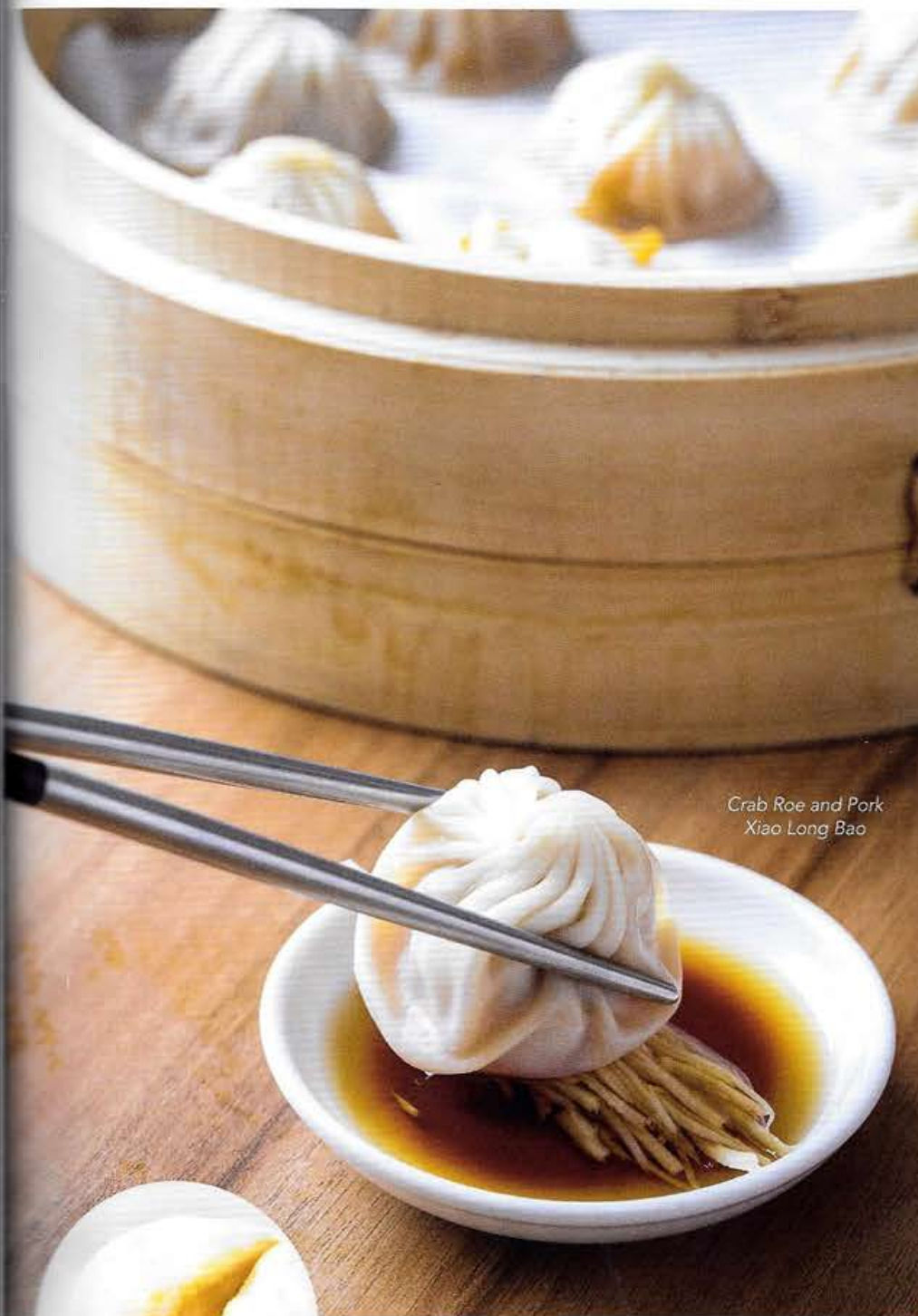
Eating *xiao long bao* is as intricate an art as making it. At Din Tai Fung, included in the New York Times's list of Top 10 Restaurants in the World in 1993, every step of making the dumplings is measured and executed carefully. Only certain chefs are tasked to assemble them, and everything—from the quality of the flour to the thickness of the wrapper (denser at the base, thinner at the hem) to the number of folds that lock in the soupy goodness—is precise.

Such minutiae deserve special attention. An order of *xiao long bao* comes with an instruction card on how to enjoy it to ensure customers get maximum satisfaction. First, dip the dumpling in the gingered soy sauce-and-black vinegar condiment. Next, poke a hole in the thin skin using the pointed metal chopsticks and slurp up some of the soup. Lastly, take a big mouthful—it's all at once hot, juicy, soupy, meaty, and tart.

Xiao long bao is Din Tai Fung's showpiece. There is the best-selling Pork, which is a burst of peppery, velvety goodness in your mouth; the Crab Roe and Pork, a bite-sized take on surf and turf; the light and zingy Chicken; and the Green Squash and Shrimp,



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Crab Roe and Pork Xiao Long Bao

Golden Lava Salted Egg Yolk Bun

which is surprisingly effective in delivering a good punch of flavor.

Greater indulgence comes in two forms: the heady and intense Truffle and Pork Xiao Long Bao, where a one-gram truffle sliver detonates in an explosive earthy note, and the Foie Gras Xiao Long Bao, a Philippine exclusive featuring a generous five grams of goose liver. The luxurious mouthfuls are delicate, buttery, rich, and a little bit magical.

The soup dumplings are the heart and soul of Din Tai Fung, but the restaurant offers more than that.

The peanut-sauce noodles are distinct but subtle; the salted-fish fried rice offers renewed interest in an Asian staple; the chicken wings feature a deliciously briny shrimp paste; and the cucumber starter is refreshing and light. Finally, the pillowy-soft buns stuffed with a rich salted egg yolk sauce may just as well steal the spotlight. It's a sweet ending indeed.

It took local franchisee The Moment Group over a year to bring these famous soup dumplings to the Philippines. And we're glad they brought the whole troop. Din Tai Fung has arrived.

IN A NUTSHELL

DIN TAI FUNG G/F SM Mega Fashion Hall, Mandaluyong City; tel. no.: 997-1935

MUST-TRIES Spicy Pickled Ginger (P125), Pork Xiao Long Bao (P160/five, P315/10), Crab Roe and Pork Xiao Long Bao (P285/five, P565/10), Truffle and Pork Xiao Long Bao (P135/piece), Chicken Wings in Shrimp Paste (P185), Fried Rice with Salted Fish (P185), Dan Dan Noodles (P135), Golden Lava Salted Egg Yolk Bun (P85/two)

THUMBS UP Enjoy unique dishes exclusive to DTF Philippines, like the rich Chocolate Lava Xiao Long Bao.

