

BAO WOW

New dumpling joint brings bao to Eugene BY TAYLOR GRIGGS

Kevin Li and his new restaurant Bao Bao House might represent the future of Eugene's culinary scene. Li, who is from Hangzhou, China, has been in the United States for more than 20 years, moving from Michigan to Kansas City to Eugene.

Eugene is quite a bit smaller than Hangzhou, which Li describes as a "medium-sized city, but we still have eight million people." Even so, Li says Eugene is more culinarily sophisticated than some might think.

"Even though we are not a big city, we have a lot of different kinds of good food," Li says. "I wanted to be a part of that."

Bao Bao House, located in downtown Eugene, opened May 28. It has options for soup, noodles, rice and dumplings. The best item is the bao, which is essentially a full meal tied up in an edible bow and served as a dumpling.

The bao buns are soft clouds of bread with a little crunch to them, and the flavors inside are fresh but not overwhelming. If you want to be overwhelmed, there are a variety of sauces for dumpling-dipping.

Bao Bao House has pork, curry beef, shrimp and vegetarian bao options, and while the order of six buns is pretty filling, the shrimp fried rice with spicy seafood "XO sauce" is a must-try, too — so fresh and unprocessed, it tastes completely unique and authentic.

The most important aspect of the restaurant for Li to get right was that authenticity and the freshness of the food. "I'm a very classical Chinese man, I like to cook everything in the Chinese way," Li says. "I don't even have a deep-frying machine."

Li says that, while Eugeneans have a variety of restaurants from which to choose, we are lacking when it comes to authentic, non-Americanized Chinese food. "I would really like people to have something different, real Chinese food. That's the reason I opened this restaurant," Li says.

The restaurant has handmade menus, individually drawn and written by Li. "I think this would be the way to show people I do things by my heart," he says.

People have been listening to his heart — the restaurant is No. 1 on Eugene's Yelp ratings right now. Li says customers have been receptive in person, too, and that he tries to utilize all of their suggestions.

With Bao Bao House's success, Li says, we might see more of his restaurants around town. Which, for people who desire authentic and sophisticated food in Eugene, would be a great thing. ■

Bao Bao House is open 11 am to 9 pm every day of the week at 868 W. Park Street. More information can be found at baobaohouseor.com.





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