

Dine / Red Dragon



Clockwise from top left: the maitake mushroom lobster, mixed with asparagus and bell pepper; the Red Dragon dining room and bar; the grilled Angus beef rib over hot stones with house-made gravy being poured tableside; the black wood ear mushroom salad (front) and the cucumber salad



Creative Cantonese

CLASSIC CHINESE DISHES COME ALIVE AT RED DRAGON.

By ASHLEY RYAN

Traditional Chinese food isn't easy to find. But with the addition of Red Dragon to Laguna Beach's restaurant lineup, those looking for cultural cuisine can delve into high-quality dishes dreamed up on the other side of the world.

With a focus on Cantonese creations from the southern part of China—and a few dishes from northern regions as well—the eatery offers classic plates with modern touches, creative plating and truly wonderful service. That's no surprise though, considering how long the

project has been in the works: Owner Enshan Zhao bought the building way back in 2013 before facing a plethora of roadblocks, from permitting and building obstacles to the COVID-19 pandemic. But, with a lengthy soft launch planned, Red Dragon opened its doors in March; a grand opening is slated for July.

Zhao and his team started developing the menu last year, though it is often rotating with both new dishes and fresh ingredients. To start, try a cocktail like the Shanghai mule or the lychee martini, which both have a slight fruitiness but are

still neutral enough to pair with anything on the menu.

Simple appetizers like the cucumber salad, with slices of vegetables that are curled into circles and served with a sauce that brings a little heat, or the black wood ear mushroom salad featuring the chewy fungi that are popular in Chinese cuisine, are a perfect introduction to the meal.

As you dive deeper into the menu, you'll find another variety in the maitake mushroom lobster, where the sauteed crustacean is cooked to perfection, flavored with garlic and ginger, and mixed with bell peppers, asparagus and—of course—maitake mushrooms before being served on the vibrant shell. Another flavorful option is the honey-glazed barbecue pork, where slices of the sweet and savory meat are accompanied by pickled radish and edible flowers.

But the dishes that really shine are those with stunning presentation, like the gold-dusted Cantonese shrimp, complete with edible gold flakes, or the grilled Angus beef rib over hot stones. The latter is truly an experience to remember, with slices of tender meat layered atop heated stones that help keep your meal warm no matter how long you spend enjoying it. This dish is also served with a house-made beef gravy that is poured tableside.

We'd be remiss not to mention the delicacies that rotate through the menu as well, like roasted pigeon, abalone and braised fish maw, made of the animal's swim bladder that's eaten in Asian cultures for the health benefits: It's rich in antioxidants that boost immunity and contains collagen to keep skin looking young.

Although it was a long time coming, Red Dragon is impressive in taste, presentation and style, with an elegant dining room placed behind a sleek bar and hanging lamps inspired by Chinese lanterns overhead. More seating is located on the second floor, which is also used for special events, and the third floor will be an alfresco rooftop with an additional bar and views of the Pacific when it launches later this summer. ■

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