



DISCOVERING BOURDAIN'S LOST SHANGHAI

SHANGHAI TODAY IS HOME TO UPSCALE GLOBAL DINING BUT SEARCH HARD
ENOUGH AND YOU CAN STILL FIND LOCAL GEMS.

BY MARK ANDREWS



Glitzy IAPM Mall on **Shanghai's** *Huai Hai Zhonglu*, one of the city's two main shopping arterials, seems a strange place to start to delve into the city's food culture. But as **Lost Plate** helps you discover, shadowing it a couple of blocks either side are hidden local eateries.

Shanghai for the late Anthony Bourdain meant two culinary obsessions, namely soup dumplings (xiaolongbao) and noodles. Unfortunately the famous Nanxiang version featured in *Parts Unknown* has succumbed to the tourist hordes. Instead *Lost Plate* takes you to a shop off *Changle lu*.

Behind a glass window a young chef dexterously wraps pork dumplings. "There are three important things with *xiaolongbao*. First the size – they should be bite size. Then there is the delicacy a good one has 20 pleats whereas many street vendor versions only have 10. Thirdly the soup should be light coloured. If it is dark they have added soy sauce and sugar because they are not confident of the taste" says Nick Zhang, guide and manager *Lost Plate*, Shanghai.

Xiaolongbao makes for an excellent appetiser until the next stop, one sure to have met with Bourdain's approval. Ducking down a lilong (alleyway) of old shikumen buildings the tour enters the Yu family's front room. Waiting on the lazy Susan are fried rice and a cold dish of cucumbers in sweetened vinegar. Soon they are joined by the piece de resistance glistening plates of sliced hongshaorou pork. Yu cooks the quintessential Shanghai dish the old way – a method that takes much of the day and where the sauce is added only at the end. The result is pork that melts in your mouth with little hint of all the fat

of the cut. Strictly invite only the Yus, former government officials, first opened their home six years ago. Like with many old style buildings Mr Yu cooks in an open kitchen around the back.

Crossing *Huai Hai Central Road* the groups call in on what was one of the first private restaurants in Shanghai after China opened up. Run by the same family for over twenty years it looks as if not much has changed during that time, and why indeed change when the food is this good? Most of the tables are conversing in the local dialect and not only is the menu here in Chinese but you also have to write down your order making it near inaccessible for outsiders. Food is a modern interpretation of Shanghai style. There is marinated beef covering baby bok choy with a raw egg on top, morning glory (water spinach) with a fermented soybean sauce, and finally deep fried winter melon chips.

Noodles were a solitary affair for Bourdain and given the comfort food reputation of scallion oil noodles many Shanghainese would agree. In a tiny shop just off the main shopping street noodles come topped with caramelised green onions harbouring tiny piece of pork which are then mixed. The experience is all about the food, Bourdain would have loved it.

This Page, from top left, Chef wrapping xiaolongbao dumplings; freshly steamed xiaolongbao with vinegar for dipping **Opposite, clockwise from left**, a dish of red cooked pork at the Yu Family home. Mr Yu in his open kitchen; a dish of morning glory; marinated beef with a raw egg on top over baby bok choy; mixing scallion oil noodles