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Spicy Issue*

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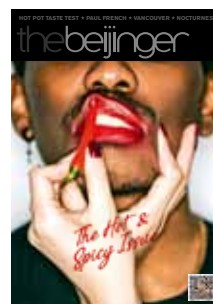
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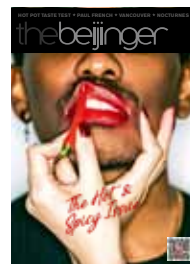
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The most important upcoming dates

WHAT'S HAPPENING



APR 5

Qingming Festival

Dust off your brooms because Tomb Sweeping Day is here! A time to celebrate life and commemorate the dead, Qingming also marks the nascent spring warmth. In order to pay proper homage to the deceased, tidy an ancestors' grave and engage in rituals like burning incense (or paper money) to bring auspiciousness to your loved ones in the afterlife.

APR 30

Grammy Fest

With an absolute scorcher of a line-up, the inaugural Grammy Festival Beijing in Changyang Park looks to start this year's festival season off with a bang. The one-day event will see globally renowned musicians Pharrell Williams, Carly Rae Jepsen, Phoenix, Macy Gray, among others, serenade audiences for the reasonable (presale) price of RMB 580.



UNTIL JUN 17

Paul McCarthy - 'Innocence'

M Woods exhibits 43 video works by the playful yet cutting LA artist Paul McCarthy. Filmed over the past 40 years, McCarthy's art is recognizable for its warped take on mainstream American media and often features pop culture characters that eschew their usual smiles-all-around veneer for something altogether more unsettling.

EVERY SATURDAY

Greybox Coffee's Brewing Classes

Add a little extra spring to your step at Greybox Coffee's spring brewing classes. Their specially trained baristas will show you the basics of brewing hand-drip coffee as well as how variables such as grind, time, and agitation affect the taste of the brew. Head to Greybox's Huamao store on Saturdays, 10.30am-midday, for their weekly class.



Visit theBeijinger.com for even more events and details.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

"Do you eat spicy?" Is there a more commonly uttered sentence that divides the masses? Some slink away at the mere mention of *la* while others dose up on heat like it's their last, teary meal. Chili forges bonds, it defines communities, and it has the power to incapacitate if you don't pay it its due respect. That's why we've dedicated this entire issue – as well as our Apr 14-15 Hot & Spicy Festival (more about that on p.44) – to the unassuming but omnipotent *Capsicum annuum*.

In these pages, we'll look at the various chilies of China (p.12-13), where to crib the best spice-infused cocktails (p.14-15), how to source and cook for your own hot pot party (p.16-17), as well as the history and deeper cultural underpinnings that the chili's introduction to China has given rise to (p.18-19).

Elsewhere, Robynne Tindall explores chili consumption outside of Sichuan (p.22-23), Tracy Wang guides us through the best of Beijing's spicy street desserts (p.38-39), Tautvile Daugelaite orders in punchy jarred products from the city's artisans (p.40-41), and Andrew Little embraces what is perhaps the biggest game-changer in Chinese mobile eating: the self-cooking hot pot (p.44-45).

Once you're thoroughly spiced-out, take a glance at the new venues around town, including Kyle Mullin's review of TRB-backed casual fine dining restaurant Hulu (p.24), and my tour of the Guardian Art Center, Beijing's shiniest addition to its art landscape (p.32). Finally, towards the back we also have our usual interviews with the city's most interesting cats: Nocturnes (p.50-51), Jennythra Raj (p.52-53), and Sahra Malik (p.54-55).

No matter your preference – spicy or not – there's a little something for everyone to relish. We look forward to seeing exactly how you like it at our Hot & Spicy Festival!



Tom Arnstein
Managing Editor



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16.1 MILLION TONNES ...

... The amount of chili that China produced in 2014, making it the largest producer of *Capsicum annuum* in the world and accounting for nearly half of all chili crops harvested globally. For comparison purposes, devotee-of-all-things-spicy Mexico is the second largest producer, growing a measly fifth of China's yield.

What does China do with all that chili? Well, the simplest answer is that they (and you) eat it. China's massive population and ongoing addiction to this spiciest of fruits means that the majority of the country's chili deposits go straight into the domestic food chain (though plenty is exported as well), largely fueling China's hot-headed populations in Sichuan, Hunan, Guizhou, as well as chili lovers in every other corner of the Middle Kingdom.

Apart from making *mapo doufu* and *gongbao jiding* the universally-loved dishes that they are

today, chilies may also have the added benefit of actually extending life expectancy. A study conducted by the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences in 2015 found that among the nearly half million male and female Chinese participants that they monitored between 2004 and 2008, there was a consistent inverse association between those with a predilection for spicy food and total mortality.

The secret to chili's death-defying properties? Unfortunately, still just that – a secret. Though no one really knows why chilies can help to decrease mortality rates, some studies suggest that its bioactive component, capsaicin, has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. It may even be as all-powerful to reduce the risk of cancer, diabetes, and weight gain. So, the next time you hear “*Ni neng chi la ma?*” Make sure to answer to with an authoritative “*Neng.*”

PHOTO: CAIXIN

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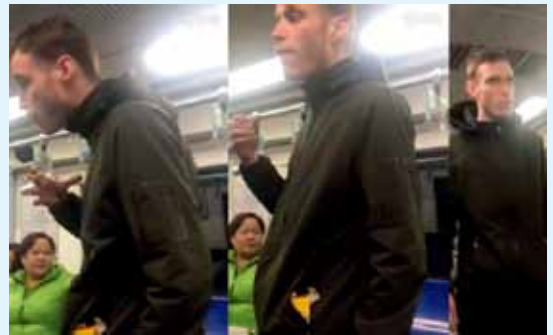


1. Beijing Concert Date for Bruno Mars Live Tour Canceled

This edition of Best of the Blog is bookended by two music announcements but on each side of the positivity scale. Sadly, for Bruno Mars fans, it came to light that the application for the Grammy Winner's proposed Apr 25 Beijing stop of his 24K Magic World Tour was quietly canceled by promoter Damai with no official explanation.

2. Chinese Netizens Jeer at Beijing Expat Smoking on Subway, Told to "Put Out Your Cigarette or Leave China"

Chinese netizens overwhelmingly denounced a Beijing expat who was caught smoking a cigarette on the subway. A video of the incident posted online showed the expat in a heated argument with several commuters in which both sides are heard trading profanities in English, including one who tells the expat to "Put out your cigarette or leave China." Fair enough.



3. Knife Attack at Beijing's Xidan Joy City Shopping Mall Kills One

A knife attack at Xidan's Joy City Mall claimed one female fatality just before CNY. Police say the suspect, a 35-year-old man from Henan named Zhu, who also injured 12 other people in the attack, has fully confessed that he carried out the armed attack in order to vent his grievances upon society.

4. From CCTV to the Silver Screen: A Short History of Blackface in China

Use of blackface on China's top TV station during its most highly-watched program, CCTV's *Spring Festival Gala*, drew worldwide controversy this CNY with a skit that included an outlandish portrayal of an African woman by a Chinese actress outfitted with an exaggerated bosom and derriere. As poorly judged as that may have been, it was certainly not the most egregious use of blackface that China has witnessed.



For these stories and more, check out theBeijinger.com/blog



5. Massive Sharebike Graveyards An Open Secret in Beijing Suburbs

Beijing remains 200,000 over its ideal limit of 2 million sharebikes and unlike previous situations that saw them unceremoniously dumped in fields far away from prying eyes, Beijing is now offloading unwanted sharebikes into “open graveyards” alongside roads and busy highways for everyone to see.

6. Beijing Hutong Culture Reaches Crisis Point as Fangjia Hutong Becomes Care Home

With news that authorities intend to tear down and demolish another 40 million square meters of “illegal structures” this year, there is no sign of Beijing’s massive urban renewal campaign slowing down. As part of the renovations, Fangjia Hutong, once one of Dongcheng’s most successful F&B hubs, has been rebranded into a “historical street” in a move that mirrors the development of other “cultural zones.” On a positive note, authorities look to also make changes to cater to the community’s older residents.



7. Air Pollution Makes You Unethical, Study Says

A recent study has shown that exposure to increased levels of air pollution, and even imagining exposure to air pollution, may lead to “unethical behavior.” Participants that were shown pictures of a polluted environment (including images of Beijing) were found to demonstrate more unethical behavior, defined as conduct that relates to crime and cheating, than those that were shown a clean environment.



8. Pharrell Williams, Carly Rae Jepsen, Phoenix, and More Slated for Inaugural Grammy Festival

Finally, we may not get Bruno Mars but it looks like we’re in for a bigger treat in the form of Pharrell Williams, Carly Rae Jepsen (pictured above), and Phoenix, slated to perform at Changyang Music Theme Park on Apr 30 for the first-ever Grammy Festival Beijing. Although we’re excited to hear of so many major acts coming our way, let’s just say that we won’t be holding our breath in anticipation.

SCENE & HEARD

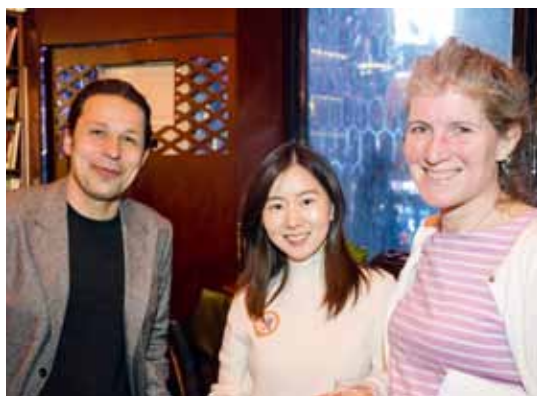


The Beijinger's Hot Chili Pepper Eating Competition through the ages (to be continued Apr 14-15)





Jing-A's Spring Fever Ski Break, Mar 10-11.
Courtesy of Jing-A



The Bookworm Literary Festival, Mar 8-25.
Courtesy of the Bookworm



EXPLORING THE

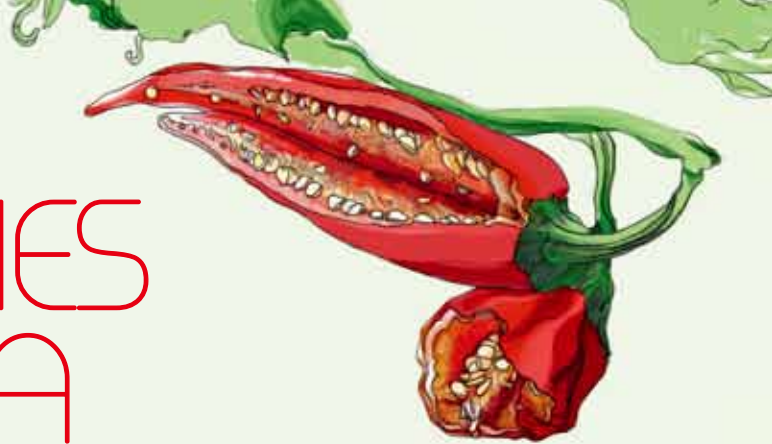
THE CHILIES OF CHINA

By Tom Arnstein

It was Mao Zedong who famously said, “no chilies, no revolution.” A native of Hunan, Mao was no stranger to the fiery effect that chilies could have on a person and although we can’t be sure whether it was the power of spice that fueled his fighting spirit, we can only assume that it provided a helping hand.

Where do the mysterious and revolutionary powers of chilies arise from? The simple answer is capsaicin, the active component in spicy peppers that binds to the pain receptors in your mouth and airways to mimic the sensation of heat. The “amount” of heat is dependent on how much capsaicin is present in the pepper and is traditionally measured by the Scoville scale, first created by American pharmacist Wilbur Scoville in 1912, with the pungency of a pepper described in Scoville heat units (SHU).

There are currently over 2,000 types of chilies in China, but given space constraints, we’ve chosen to outline only five of the most notable varieties below.



Facing Heaven Pepper (朝天椒)

approx. 40,000 SHU

This cone-shaped and fragrant medium-hot chili pepper will be recognizable to lovers of Sichuan cuisine and is unusual for growing upwards, toward the heavens, instead of down. Cooking often reduces the spiciness of the pepper to something closer to a nice and easy burn.

Yunnan Wrinkled Skin Pepper (云南皱皮辣椒)

approx. 55,000 SHU

These green wrinkly peppers are particular to Yunnan and feature a moderate heat that, according to one user, will “after a few mouthfuls create a slight feverish feeling, with layers of sweat ready to break out.” Pah! Still in comfortable territory here, folks.



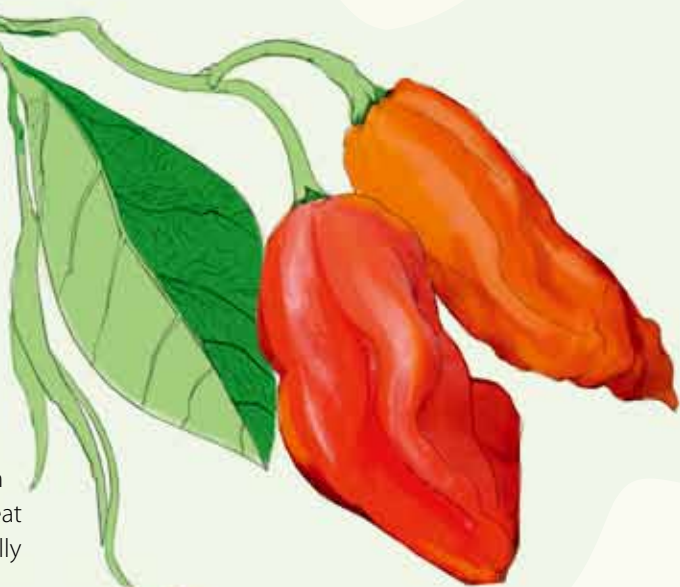


Sichuan Seven-Star Pepper

(四川七星椒)

approx. 60,000 SHU

Another type of facing heaven pepper, this purple-ish variety is native to Sichuan province and is renowned for being one of the spiciest peppers in all of south of China. Coming in seven distinct levels of heat (hence the name), so all-encompassing is the spice found in the Sichuan seven-star pepper that the Guinness Book of World Records has previously held chili eating competitions using only this variety.



Hainan Yellow Lantern Chili

(黄灯笼辣椒)

approx. 170,000 SHU

Local to Hainan, the yellow lantern chili is a member of the capsicum Chinense family, more commonly known as the bonnet pepper. Notorious for their exceptional heat and unique flavors, this bright yellow beauty is usually pressed into hot sauce and is best ingested sparingly.



Yunnan Shuan Shuan Chili

(云南涮涮辣)

approx. 1,000,000 SHU

Shuan shuan chilies grow wild in southwest China, on the border with Myanmar, and require gloves just to hold them. Their name derives from the method in which locals eat them: *shuan* literally refers to the action of dipping in boiling water – what is the equivalent of *shabu shabu* in Japanese.



HOT CONCOCTIONS

A FIERY INVENTORY OF BEIJING'S SPICIEST COCKTAILS

By Kyle Mullin

Forget the old cliché about biting into a hot pepper and downing a cool drink for relief – keep the burn going with Beijing's spiciest cocktails. Some of the mixes below will feel like instant napalm for your palate, while others have a subtle sizzle that'll linger long after the last gulp.



DIRTY CHERRY – SANCTUARY

RMB 70

Key ingredients: Vodka infused with various peppers, mixed with in-house made tomato and smoked pepper soup. The secret ingredient: achar pickle brine made with pineapples, chilies, and a mix of vegetables, herbs, and spices.

Spicy inspiration: Owner Caroline Tan says this cocktail is a variation on one of her all-time favorites: the Bloody Mary. However, she elevates that somewhat standard drink with a number of unique Southeast Asian twists, like adding the kind of brine she seasoned her rice and sandwiches with throughout her childhood in Singapore.



LITTLE DEVIL – HOPER

RMB 80

Key ingredients: Rum base, Cointreau and Malibu liqueurs, fresh chili and ginger
Spicy inspiration: "The aromas of its orange peel and coconut are richly layered," says owner James Hao. He adds that the cocktail's "Ginger and its chili peppers are hot and spicy, which will give you a warm feeling."



PHOTOS: JUNI YOU



LOST IN ANDES – PRESS RELEASE

RMB 85

Key ingredients: Andes Pisco, green apple, coriander, piri piri chili, elderflower

Spicy inspiration: Owner Issey Lin got the idea for this drink “from a book by Nobel Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa called *Death in Andes*. The book explores the sin, violence, and romance in a remote Andean tribe.” That prompted Lin to use Andes pisco, a traditional Peruvian liquor, to represent the mystique of Peru. She then blended in chili for a hot sensation akin to unforgiven sin, before adding green apple for a touch of unexpected romance.



LOST IN THAILAND – MAI BAR

RMB 60

Key ingredients: Lemongrass, lemon leaves, coconut, chili

Spicy inspiration: Not one to shy away from experimentation, owner Jeff Ji based this cocktail on the Thai dish of *tom yam kung* soup. After visiting Thailand a whopping total of five times last year alone, Ji decided to dedicate one of his cocktails to the mouthwatering delights of spicy Thai cuisine.



HOT, NAKED, AND FAMOUS – BUNGALOW TIKI

RMB 65

Key ingredients: Lime, Aperol, yellow chartreuse, and Mezcal infused with habanero

Spicy inspiration: Co-owner and co-bartender Peter Carey says, “It’s a drink from the *Death and Co* cocktail book which we twisted up to invoke the spicy Latino spirit. It’s a sophisticated cocktail, with sour, smoky, spicy, and herbal flavors.”



By Tracy Wang

PHOTO: UNI YOU, COURTESY OF DONGWAI XIAO GUAN



With a history that dates back a thousand years, hot pot has gone on to birth seemingly just as many variations, including Sichuan spicy hot pot, Cantonese hot pot, Hainan coconut hot pot, Mongolian hot pot, Guizhou sour and spicy hot pot, and even Japanese *nabemono* and Korean *jeongol* ... the list goes on. To make things increasingly complicated, every popular hot pot chain has its own tried and tested secret broth recipe, for which they would sooner guzzle unadulterated gutter oil than consider ever giving up, and no one wants to see that. Luckily, we're seasoned in the ways of DIY hot pot and have the perfect recipe for when you want to pig out at home.

There are three parts to any good hot pot: the broth, the ingredients, and the sauce. The broth acts like the soul of the dish and often contains meat bones that have been cooked for hours alongside herbs and spices. You can buy the condensed broth at any supermarket or order them online to save the hassle, but if you decide to make your own and have plenty of time to kill, this will make a decent base:

BROTH INSTRUCTIONS

1. Boil a large pot of water, then add beef bones or chopped chicken, ginger slices, scallions, salt, and chopped garlic.
2. Heat up a wok, add oil, ginger, and garlic. Once nicely fried, add Sichuan peppercorns, dried red chilies, fennel, star anise, chili oil, a bay leaf, a stick of cinnamon, and cloves and stir-fry for about two minutes.
3. Add the stock from step 1 to the wok and heat until boiling. Your broth is now ready and can be transferred to a shallow pot on an electric plate so that you (and potentially your guests) can begin the long hot pot session.

INGREDIENTS FOR DIPPING

Protein: Thinly shaved beef, pork, and lamb; fish fillet, meatballs, seafood, minced shrimp paste.

Bean products: Sponge tofu, frozen tofu, soft tofu, fried tofu.

Staples: Noodles, mung bean vermicelli, dumplings, wontons.

Vegetables: Chinese cabbage, lettuce, spinach, potato, sweet potato, lotus root, celeriac, broccoli.

Fungus: Mushrooms, needle mushrooms, *mu'er*.

SAUCES

Even if you visited a hot pot restaurant, you would be expected to mix your own dipping sauces. Go authentic Chongqing-style with a can of sesame oil, chopped garlic, and chopped coriander or if you like a sesame (*majiang*) base, simply mix vinegar, sesame paste (or peanut butter), chili powder, chili oil, salt, and chopped green onion. Add fermented tofu, oyster sauce, minced peanuts, green peppers, and bird's-eye chilies for optional oomph.

DELIVERY

Finally, if you're just too damn lazy to be running around trying to track down a steel pot, ingredients, and spices, you can always beckon Haidilao, the perennially popular hot pot chain via any one of Beijing's delivery platforms. Not only will they deliver the hot pot, broth, ingredients, dipping sauces, and even trash bags, they'll come back and pick it all up once you're incapacitated. Could there be anything more comforting?



BENIGN MASOCHISM

PUTTING OUT THE FIRE OF SPICE-BASED STEREOTYPES

By Jeremiah Jenne



"Can you make it a little spicy," I asked the server at my local Sichuan greasy spoon.

"Are you sure?" the 19-year-old waitress says with that mix of disbelief, condescension, and surprise in Sichuan-accented Mandarin that makes you want to move to Chengdu and fall in love.

"Yes. I like spicy."

"Foreigners can eat spicy?" she asks/declares to her colleague standing nearby.

Yes. Foreigners can eat spicy.

And ... end scene.

I'm not about to go round-for-round scarfing down Yunnan shabu shabu peppers with Ankit "Curry-Gainz" Nayal, the *Beijinger* 2017 Hot Chili Pepper Eating Contest winner (pictured below), but I do like it spicy. I blame a childhood growing up in New England, a part of the United States where every recipe calls for meat, vegetables, and a starch to be put into a pot and boiled until all ingredients reach an indistinguishable shade of beige. I know people back home who think spaghetti is a little "too ethnic." When I moved to Asia, it was a revelation of flavors ... many of them hot and spicy.

We, meaning humans like you and me, shouldn't like the chili pepper. Capsaicin – the ingredient that provides the burn in the chili – didn't evolve over millions of years to make my noodles more interesting.

It was designed to encourage other species to seriously consider munching some other plant.

Our love of the chili is counter-intuitive, and yet it has become the go-to spice for chefs around the world. Perhaps we love the pain? Psychology professor Paul Rozin, who researches why we like and dislike certain foods, has suggested it's a form of "benign masochism."

"Hotness" is also apparently not associated with taste. There is no spicy zone for taste buds. Biting into a pepper instead is a sensation, your tongue believes it is being burned. Pain receptors register the burning sensation and notify your brain which then responds by flooding the zone with feel-good endorphins.

And yet, that doesn't explain why some cultures love spicy food and/or assume that anyone else must be a spice wimp who requires all food to be hospital bland.

In China, there are certain provinces – Sichuan and Hunan come to mind – known for their love of the *la*, but there are just as many parts of the country where locals go out of their way to avoid spicy food. This suggests a larger problem in the question of who can eat spicy food, allowing for personal preference independent of cultural background. This can go two ways.

As I said, I'm from New England, but I like spicy food. I enjoy a little sweat on



my brow after a good hot pot. This has nothing to do with where I'm from or, from what I can tell, anything in my DNA. If I tap out, all I'm doing is feeding the stereotype that doughy white boys should be careful playing with serious spice.

In that regard, I sometimes feel sorry for those from the spice belts. They have a lot to live up to.

Many years ago, when I was just a young lad on my first foray into Asia, a university classmate and I stepped into a small noodle shack somewhere in Bangkok. Time and chemicals cloud the location of this shack, but I do remember the food.

Our lunch was freshly boiled noodles with yet-to-be-identified meat and a few slivers of vegetables to give a head shake in the direction of nutrition plus a generous helping of chopped chilies. If there is pleasure in pain, this was it. It was also not good enough for my traveling companion. Hailing from southern California, he felt that two decades of eating at taco trucks had adequately prepared his system to take on a Thai chef with sadism in his heart and two Tupperware boxes full of capsaicin death at his disposal.

"This isn't as spicy as Mexican food," said my friend. "Bring it, chief. I mean really bring it."

Did I mention we'd been drinking?

The chef complied with a few more dollops of chilies, but his pepper parsimony displeased my friend. "Dude! I said bring it. I'm from San Diego. I can eat spicy food all day."

Something in my friend's tone had caused our Thai host to abandon any pretense of restraint. He took one of his not insignificant Tupperware bowls of peppers and dumped it into my friend's soup. The chef's expression was not one of kindness.

As a good friend, knowing that eating this would mean certain gastrointestinal shock and awe, I turned to my companion and said helpfully: "If you eat the whole thing, bro, I'll buy the next round of beers."

Ah, youth. If the most common last words in the English language are "What the f*** was that noise?" the runner-up phrase is undoubtedly "Hold my beer, dude. Watch this."

Yeah, he was in pain and while he maintained a brave face – and got his beer – he clearly regretted his hubris well into the next morning.

I'm not willing to do that to myself in pursuit of my love of chilies, in Thailand or here in China. But I am looking for a little respect. If I say I want it spicy, damn it, make it hot. I know I seem like I'm suffering, what with the red face, sweat pouring out of my ears, and sinuses running like a Beijing street vendor who sees the *chengguan* coming, but that's part of the fun.

Don't judge me, just leave me to my "benign masochism" and bring on the chilies.

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FOOD & DRINK

HULU // GERTZ // STRAIGHT SPIRIT // SHANXI PROV GOV // PRIVATE KITCHEN 44



ZIJIN MANSION'S SPRING SIGNATURE DISHES

The Waldorf Astoria's Zijin Mansion greets spring with a lip-smacking delicacy that might not be to everyone's tastes, but then again, which Chinese delicacies are? Enter the starter of spicy, curled goose lips (actually the goose's palate) and peanut shoots (RMB 158), just one of the more esoteric options on Zijin Mansion's bamboo-centric signature spring menu. Not to be dismissed outright, the cold combination of goose lips, peanut shoots, and chili oil makes for a light and crispy combination that prepares diners for heavier Cantonese mains like stir-fried snow dragon beef, fresh scallops, and braised pork belly. Until Apr 30. RMB 888 (set menu for two). Zijin Mansion, Waldorf Astoria, 5-15 Jinyu Hutong, Wangfujing, Dongcheng District (8520 8989)

PHOTO COURTESY OF WALDORF ASTORIA

NIBBLES AND SIPS

Now with Spring Festival well behind us, Beijing's restaurants are back at it with plenty of dining promotions and new menus for the spring season.

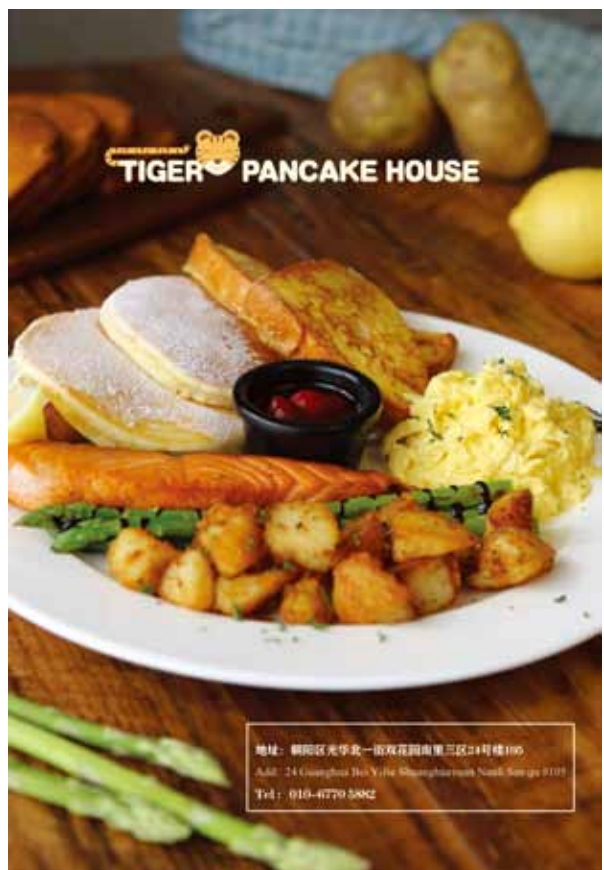
Take, Q Mex Bar & Grill, for example. They have updated their menu with around 10 new dishes, including spicy corn chowder, chicken and penne pasta in a creamy and spicy tomatillo sauce, and – one for dessert fans (although perhaps not the lactose intolerant) – tres leches cake, a sponge cake soaked in three different types of milk and topped with whipped cream and toasted coconut. Some of the dishes, such as the jalapeño butter shrimp tacos, will be familiar to Q Mex Taqueria fans where they made their debut.

The tireless team at Beyond Yakitori have also added a series of new dishes to the menu, such as sweet shrimp sashimi topped with soybean sauce, grated daikon, fresh radish, and caviar, and an intriguing twist on the scotch egg with a diver-caught scallop replacing the usual egg. With great deals such as 20 percent off all skewers when you order a drink, Beyond Yakitori has very much cemented its place among our favorite party restaurants.

The team behind Taco Bar have launched a new pop-up concept, East Canteen, serving lunch Tue-Fri, 11.30am-2pm. The menu features four fast casual sets, such as braised pork knuckle with lotus rice or vegetarian crispy mapo tofu, are inspired by early Chinese settlers in Asia adapting Chinese cuisine to the local environment and culture. All sets are priced at RMB 65 and include a main, rice, pickled cucumbers, grated potato salad, steamed seasonal greens, chicken soup, pannacotta, and a soft drink. As of yet, there is no word as to when the pop-up will finish but get down there ASAP just in case.

Not a new deal but one that we feel deserves more attention is the all-you-can-eat deal at Hagaki, now available from 5.30-10pm every weekday and for brunch from 11.30am-2.30pm on Saturday and Sunday. From RMB 298 per person, you can enjoy all-you-can-eat Japanese classics like sushi rolls and tempura, as well as free-flow house wine, beer, and soft drinks.

Ending on some sad news, after just over two years in business, Houhai-adjacent high-end restaurant The Georg and the encapsulating Georg Jensen Hus lifestyle concept shut down at the end of March. The Danish-style fine dining destination – known for both its opulent ambiance and for being the lifestyle brand's first Beijing foray – has decided to focus on its products instead at the behest of Georg Jensen HQ.



BEYOND SICHUAN

EXPLORING THE SPICY TRADITIONS OF FOUR CHINESE PROVINCES

By Robynne Tindall



If you haven't traveled much in China then you could be forgiven for thinking that the best of spicy food begins and ends with Sichuan Province. However, there is much more to spicy food in China, and even in Sichuan itself, than bright red chili oil and mounds of mouth-numbing Sichuan pepper. Chilies have conquered the palates of most of China in one way or another but each province has its own way of applying them and other spices based on the local climate and produce.

Hunan

Hunan food is close to Sichuan food in terms of spice level but there are a few key differences. Firstly, most dishes eschew Sichuan pepper, allowing the flavor of the chilies (used liberally, both fresh and dried) to shine through. Secondly, Hunan cuisine makes much greater use of dried, preserved meats, giving many dishes a smoky, savory edge. Those aforementioned fresh chilies are also a major feature of Hunan cuisine, for example, in the homestyle dish *xiaochao* pork, pork stir-fried with red and green chilies. All of this contributes to a more on-the-nose piquancy than the mouth-coating spiciness of Sichuan cuisine.

Where to eat it: Karaiya Spice House is a great choice for those making their first in-roads into spicy food as the spice level of each dish is clearly

marked. On the other side of town, trendy restaurant Southern Fish proves that hearty flavors and modern, minimalist design can be a perfect pairing. Try the eye-wateringly spicy crushed green chilies with preserved eggs.



CRUSHED CHILIES ARE A FORMIDABLE FORCE IN HUNAN CUISINE

PHOTOS: WIKIMEDIA, BAI DU BAI KE, PHERE

Guizhou

The cuisine of Guizhou is known for its sour-spicy flavors. Unlike some other cuisines, such as that of Shaanxi Province, this sourness comes from fermentation rather than the use of vinegar and many dishes feature pickled vegetables or chilies. One dish that encapsulates these flavors is the Miao-influenced dish sour fish soup, a steaming stew of tomatoes, cabbage, pickled chilies, and river fish. The relatively minimal approach to ingredients in Guizhou dishes means that the food can actually be extremely spicy. To give you an idea of just how spicy the food is, turn to the popular saying, "Sichuan people don't fear spicy, Hunan people can eat anything not matter how spicy, Guizhou people fear their food won't be spicy enough."

Where to eat it: We're still mourning the loss of hutong Guizhou restaurant Da Gui but there are plenty of other options in Beijing. Just Fun in Shuangjing offers homestyle Guizhou cuisine in a tchotchke-filled setting while Private Kitchen 44 (see p.30) does a definitive sour fish soup.

Yunnan

As the Chinese province home to the largest number of ethnic minorities (more than 20), it is hard to make generalizations about Yunnan Cuisine. The cuisine of the Bai minority is probably the most widely known outside of Yunnan, thanks to mass tourism in the area around Dali. The cuisine here isn't defined by spice but chilies

crop up in various forms; chili oil in a beef soup, say, or mixed with ground Sichuan pepper to season a crispy potato pancake. Traveling further south into the region on the border with Laos and Myanmar, dried chilies are replaced with fresh and lime juice makes an appearance in cold dishes and salads – think Thai cuisine without the sweet-sour-salty balance.

Where to eat it: For Yunnan cuisine in Beijing, our heart belongs to Little Yunnan. Try the beef and mint salad, which has a good chili kick. Elsewhere, the shredded chicken salad at Yun'er Xiaozhen is a good example of the cuisines use of both lime and chili.



Xinjiang

The cuisine of Xinjiang, influenced by Uighur, Hui, Central Asian, and other predominantly Muslim culinary traditions, couldn't be further from the pork and soy sauce flavors of eastern China. For many, the defining flavor of this region is the chili-cumin mix that gets sprinkled on grilled lamb kebabs. In an area that mostly cooks with lamb and beef, cumin is the perfect complementary spice. Xinjiang isn't the only cuisine to use cumin, however; it crops up in Hunan cuisine, too, and other areas with a largely Hui Muslim population. Like many areas of China, Xinjiang has not escaped the inexorable spread of the Sichuan peppercorn, which pops up in the popular dish "big plate chicken" (*da pan ji*), a stew of chicken, peppers, and potatoes.

Where to eat it: You will find *chuan'r* being grilled on street corners across Beijing come summer but for a sit-down experience it doesn't get much better than Baron Rozi at Dongsishitiao. Also, venerable restaurant Crescent Moon has remained popular for so long for a reason; the lamb kebabs are of particularly good quality here.



WHAT'S NEW RESTAURANTS

HULU

THE TRB TEAM'S NEW TAKE ON CASUAL

Sun-Thu 11am-11pm, Fri-Sat 11am-midnight. 3/F, Taikoo Li South, Sanlitun, Chaoyang District (6512 5701)

朝阳区三里屯太古里南区三楼

Prior to the opening of their new Hulu restaurant, we Beijingers usually turned to the TRB team anytime we had to splurge to impress. Yes, TRB Hutong and TRB Forbidden City are the kind of places you take your significant other on their birthday or your parents when they're in town because the high-end service and ambiance of those restaurants are practically unparalleled in the capital. But now, proprietor Ignace Lecleir and his cohorts may soon become better-known for their elegant comfort food at Hulu.

The new Taikooli restaurant has a far broader appeal thanks to an approachable range of salads, pasta, burgers, beef tartare, and soufflés at prices that will leave you salivating all the more, with most running between RMB 60-120. That down-to-earth, low-key sentiment is furthered by the decor: A white and blue color scheme punctuated by a lively splash of pink here and there and huge picture windows that give Hulu an airy, laid-back vibe. The encroaching warmer weather can't come quickly enough given that it will allow us to take advantage of their wide-open terrace (which Cantina Agave also made ample use of over the years until Hulu took over the space).

Menu highlights include appetizers like plump cherry tomatoes stuffed with creamy avocado and tender

ground prawns (RMB 42 and 48, respectively), a RMB 42 plateful of quail eggs pan-fried to firmly juicy perfection, a tray of bouncy beef sliders (RMB 68 for three), and lusciously tender flank steak (RMB 148 for 200g). Each is generously portioned and easy to share, a sentiment that TRB has made the crux of this new outing. However, it was the roast suckling pig that stole the show. Featuring a crispy skin that encased meat practically tender enough to melt in your mouth, we have yet to try anything quite like it in Beijing.

The desserts are also on point, especially the fluffier-than-a-cloud RMB 68 soufflé, and the RMB 58 flaming passion fruit ice cream that was cool, crisp, and chock-full of strawberries. Sweet-toothed patrons will love the latter, but others may in fact find it too indulgent. A strong alternative is the subtler hollowed-out passion fruit pannacotta (RMB 28), with its filling of juicy fruit and velvety yogurt.

In all, it's great to see Lecleir ditching his suit jacket for a chef's apron and getting back in the kitchen to ready this casual yet creative food. From the reasonable prices to the prime location and – above all – the dishes' deft balance between gourmet and approachability, there's plenty here to back up Hulu's immediate hype. *Kyle Mullin*



PHOTO: UNI YOU



GERTZ

ALLURING LOAVES, PACKED SANDWICHES, AND HYGGE IN SLT

Daily 9am-10pm. S2-11, 1/F, Bldg 2, Sanlitun Taikooli, 19 Sanlitun, Chaoyang District

朝阳区三里屯路19号院2号楼1层S2-11单元

Central Sanlitun seems to be having a bit of a café and bakery explosion right now. To add to the plethora of ground-floor bakeries in Topwin Center as well as the newly minted Moleskine Café, Gertz Danish Bakery continues the positive trend toward baking that aligns more with Western standards (read: bread that's not sweet and cakes that are not slathered in whipped cream).

Gertz wears its Scandinavian roots on its sleeve: A neat minimalist décor moves the gamut of neutral tones from cream to light gray to dark blue. Edison bulbs match the café's sparse design and have the effect of illuminating the mountain of bread, priced between RMB 9-42, with a warm and comforting glow.

Aside from those loaves, there are plenty of basic Danish-kissed dishes, such as salads (RMB 66/68), soups (RMB 25-42), open sandwiches (or *smørrebrød*, RMB 48-54), regular sandwiches (RMB 58/62), breakfast sets (RMB 48-62), as well as the usual drink options: coffee (RMB 24-34), tea, and juice.

The salmon sandwich (RMB 62) was a satisfying wedge of baguette covered with black and white sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds, and full of thick slices of smoked salmon,

a generous spoonful of caviar, sour cream, dill, and lettuce. The sandwich more than proved its heft given that we had to pick it up with both hands, only having to put it down so as to fork the fillings back in from time to time.

Of the open sandwiches, or *smørrebrød*, the egg and shrimp option (RMB 48) is served on a rustic wooden board and features a large lettuce leaf atop a piece of rye bread and finished off with a sliced boiled egg, tomato, shrimp, and mayonnaise. Similarly to the sandwich, it called for a certain technique to best tackle the wobbling and blooming flower-like tower.

For a dessert option, the large, moist, and irrefutably delicious *kanelsnegle* (cinnamon bun, RMB 18) comes covered in icing sugar and a punchy cinnamon kick that is sweet enough to have you instantly hooked.

Indeed, from the moment you enter this inviting bakery and café, breathe in the soothing aroma of the freshly baked bread, and devour one of its sizable sandwiches (open or closed), you'll soon be wrapped in a plush blanket of what is now perhaps Denmark's most famous export: Hygge – a deep feeling of coziness. *Tracy Wang*

STRAIGHT SPIRIT

ROCK-BOTTOM RETAIL PRICED WHISKEY IN THE CBD

Daily, 11am-11pm. Bldg 26, Room 103A, Central Park (6501 5917)

直人烈酒商店：朝阳区朝阳门外大街6号新城国际26号楼103A底商

Straight Spirit – the name says it all. Patrons can pop into this cozy Central Park liquor shop and events venue (which can currently fit about 30 patrons) and throw down retail prices that amount to far less than what you'd shell out at other shops or at a bar.

A prime example is the Balvenie DoubleWood 12 (whiskey takes up the majority of the shop's inventory of 200 label varieties, though there's a handful of other spirits and wines). It would set you back RMB 625 elsewhere, but is instead RMB 578 for nonmembers at Straight Spirit. Members can take a bottle home for just RMB 376. To take advantage of such especially low prices, members must pay RMB 5,000 up front, which also goes toward credit to be used at the store. The venue's five by-the-glass options provide even more of a bargain, with a cup of Dalwhinnie 12 costing RMB 29, and even the priciest Dalmore 18 a smooth RMB 96.

The straight ethos from which the owners took their name extends beyond the pricing. "It's about being direct – the pricing is direct, and the sourcing is direct from original

distillers and winemakers so it's 100 percent guaranteed, no fakes," explains Glenn Schuitman (of Pop-Up Beijing fame). Schuitman co-founded the space with two Beijing bar scene pioneers, Wilfred Kwok (of the decade-old Sanlitun south lounge Glen) and Dirty Bar Street vet Ah Jian (founder of The Bar, Shooters, and a veteran of other SLT spots like Groovy Schiller's).

While the rock-bottom pricing will be Straight Spirit's biggest draw, Kwok also wants to lure customers with casual service and a relaxed atmosphere to match. Rather than just a shop, albeit one that forfeits a bar for lush vintage tables and chairs, Kwok and his partners hope curious patrons will settle in and relish 100ml samples rather than having to purchase an entire bottle. Kwok concludes with a laugh, "We don't have a bar in here, not only because it would take up too much space in such a small spot, but also because we want to 'break the bar.' The bar can be a barrier between the owner and the customer. We want to make things more approachable here." *Kyle Mullin*



PHOTO: UNI YOU

BEST OF BEIJING



Dan dan noodles sit alongside *gongbao jiding* and *mapo* tofu at the top of the pantheon of famous Sichuan-style dishes. The name “*dan dan*” comes from the pole that street vendors who sold the dish carried over their shoulders. Like most street foods, there are hundreds of different versions of *dan dan* noodles – some soupier, some adding sesame paste, and some with an almost ragu-like meat sauce – but the basic components are usually chili oil, minced meat (beef or pork), preserved vegetables, and Sichuan pepper.

Zhang Mama, RMB 8

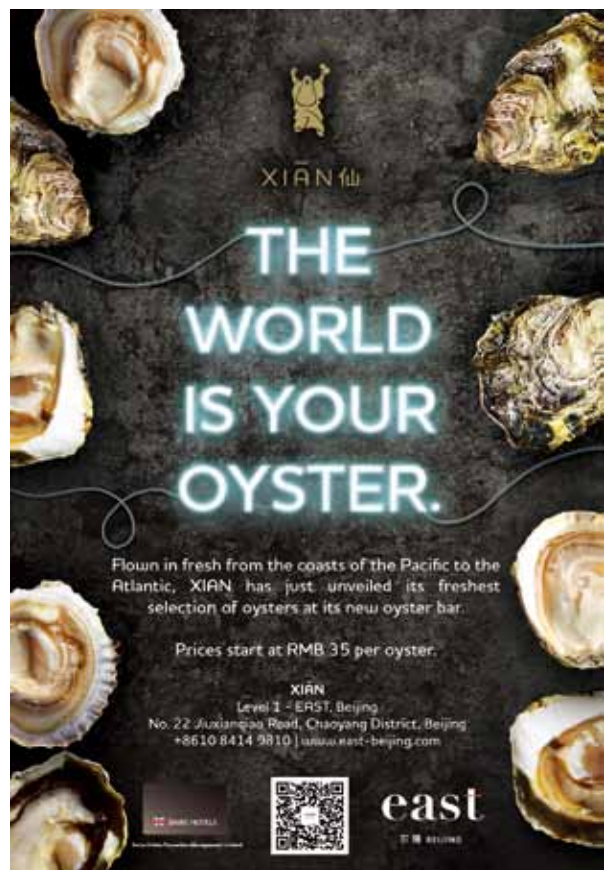
For truly gasp-inducingly spicy *dan dan* noodles, try Zhang Mama. The noodles arrive looking innocent enough but once you stick your chopsticks in you'll find a layer of hot and numbing oil at the bottom of the bowl that will have you clutching at the nearest bottle of Yanjing – although that won't stop you from finishing them. The RMB 8 price point doesn't hurt, either.

Transit, RMB 35

We're not fans of unnecessary fusion or modernisation in our food but if it happens to improve the dish then we're all for it. Take Transit's *dan dan* noodles, which are served with a side of lime to squeeze over. The lime boosts the citrus notes of the Sichuan pepper and soothes the dish's spice (although true spice fiends will find Transit's version relatively mild).

Jindingxuan, RMB 8

If you can't handle the heat, then Jindingxuan's *dan dan* noodles is the bowl for you. Jindingxuan cuts down on the chili oil and ups the sesame paste, creating a silky sauce that perfectly coats the noodles. The lack of chili oil also allows the umami flavors of the preserved vegetables to shine through. Your braver dining companions have the option to order a spicy version for themselves.



IB

WANGJING'S NEWEST AND DECIDEDLY CHINESE-STYLE BREWPUB

Daily 2-11pm. 5-102-107 Hesheng Qilishe, Wangjing (183 1099 0386)

精酿啤酒餐吧：望京阜安西路合生麒麟汇5-102-107

As of late, it's mainly been closures of brewpubs for our dear Beijing. So when we heard of iB brewpub launching in Wangjing, we sobbed, we threw our hands up to the sky, and hurried to the northeast of the city in a fit of ecstasy. Even the one-hour, traffic-packed ride out couldn't quell our excitement.

Joining Kamehameha, one of the few other brewpubs in the otherwise untapped Wangjing, iB, short for iBrew (not the eponymous Beijing-based cider brand, nor the international education program), christened their two-floor venue in February. From the exterior design alone, you can tell iB is not just any other brewpub. Outside, a line of small stone lions guard the yard and are joined by a floor-to-ceiling painting of a massive red lion on the façade. The lion theme continues indoors with colorful lion dance costumes and paintings as well as lines of Taoist wisdom throughout the venue. Yes, iB is full of auspicious Chinese elements but not to the point of distracting from its main purpose.

The bar sits close to the entrance, dominating the space with its sheer stainless and marble table, a huge bell hanging above, and nine brews (RMB 35-45 for 400ml, RMB 40-55 for 500ml) on tap, all brewed by iB founder Ma Xiaojian. The best way to get to grips with what Ma is about is by trying each

of his brews via a flight of six small glasses (RMB 108), six pints (RMB 188), 10 small glasses (RMB 180), or 10 pints (RMB 300) – a decent price for what will be a very long session. Groups looking to settle in can also order a 7-liter tower of wheat beer for RMB 468.

Best of the bunch were the Elephant King Pilsner, which has a gold color, a floral hoppy aroma, and a light golden body. The Passionfruit Turbidity IPA (a squint-inducing RMB 80 per pint) was a New England-style IPA with a strong passion fruit nose and a lingering bitterness. If you're not in the mood for beer, try the sweet and creamy piña colada, which is served in a coconut shell for a decidedly Southeast Asian flavor not often found in Wangjing.

For the hungry, the pork knuckle, sausages, and sauerkraut (RMB 168) are simply delicious. Just one bite of the steaming pork knuckle's crispy crackling is enough to have you close your eyes in satisfaction and tell yourself, "This alone was worth the trip."

In all, the lions, bells, carps, paintings, beers, and food at iB will certainly make Wangjing's beer lovers feel just that little bit luckier. Now all we need are a few more bars so that those of us who make the trek can dive into a proper pub crawl. *Tracy Wang*



PHOTO: UNI YOU



SHANXI PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT RESTAURANT

A LESSER-KNOWN CUISINE NOT EVEN SAVED BY THE NOODLES

Daily 11.30am-1.30pm, 5.30-7.30pm. 16 Jingdian West Street, Dongcheng District (6400 6622)

晋府大酒店：东城区景山西街16号山西省人民政府驻京办事处

Pulling up to Beijing's Shanxi Provincial Government Restaurant on the northwest side of Jingshan Park, you're immediately struck by the grandiosity of the facade. The sturdy two-level brick front with a Qing dynasty-style overhang invites you inside and down into the affiliated restaurant below. Sadly, the magic ends there. Sporting a conspicuously empty house on a Friday evening, the staff were fidgeting to make their escape and promptly informed us that the last orders are at 7.30pm. How about a beer while we peruse the menu? Nope, someone forgot to restock.

Not particularly well known outside of the region, Shanxi cuisine, aka *jīn* cuisine, is heavily reliant on starchy staples – wheat and flour make for oodles of noodles, like its most famous export, knife-cut noodles (*daoxiaomian*). This particular rendition (RMB 15/10) was notable for its blandness, a soggy bowl of too-thin noodles served separately from the tomato sauce that you'd be advised to mix quickly before the lot congeals into a tepid lump. Moving on, the Shanxi specialty of "You Bake Grandma" (RMB 22), an unfortunate mistranscription bolstered by a mistranslation of its original name (*you mian kao laolao*), didn't fair much better. Said to be over 1,400 years old,

this dish – circular columns of oat-based noodle filling a steamer basket – was distinctive in appearance only and could not be salvaged with a hefty dunk into the accompanying soy and scallion sauce.

It wasn't all bad though. The tofu, minced mutton, cabbage, and seaweed soup (RMB 64, pictured above) stole the show courtesy of its rich broth and robust combination of ingredients. The bowl even comes labeled as a "specialty dish" in case you were under any other illusion. The chewy and paunch-establishing dessert of deep-fried maze balls with a red bean paste filling (RMB 4 each) were a decent way to fill up and brush over the failings of the mains.

However, not even those highlights could save the comparatively cheap but markedly glum experience of Shanxi Prov Gov. Looking for the staff so as to pay up and get out, we headed to the counter only to find three *fuwuyuan* squatting in hiding behind it. One was face-deep in a burger, juicy bits of meat and shredded lettuce hardly contained by the tatters of the waxy fast food wrapper. We made eye contact, smiled, and parted with a sympathetic shrug. *Tom Arnstein*

PRIVATE KITCHEN 44

FROM FARM TO TABLE, GUIZHOU STYLE

Daily 11am-2pm, 5-9.30pm. 70 Deshengmen Neidajie, Xicheng District (6400 1280)

胡同四十四号厨房：西城区德胜门内大街70号

When you sign up to write about restaurants you know in advance that on top of many excellent dining experiences you will also encounter a steady stream of people asking you to recommend your “favorite restaurant” and “the best place to take visitors.” Over the years I have developed a set answer to this question but a recent mental stock take revealed that I haven’t actually been to a few of my top five recommendations in as many years.

Oversights such as this are, of course, the inspiration behind the Back for More column and of my recent visit to Private Kitchen 44, a Guizhou restaurant located just to the west of Houhai. One of the original batches of readily recommendable hutong restaurants, Private Kitchen 44 has been around in one guise or another for more than 10 years. The food has always focused on Guizhou classics such as fish in sour soup and has evolved over the years to reflect a farm-to-table ideology, as evidenced by the extensive list of suppliers from Beijing and further afield detailed at the front of the menu.

The aforementioned sour fish soup is as good as a version as I have tried in Beijing, filled with thick slices

of grass carp in a tangy broth with a background note of fermentation akin to Korean kimchi stew. You can choose to order 250g (RMB 56) or 500g (RMB 108) of fish, so smaller groups needn’t worry about being over-faced by a huge bowl of expensive stew. Vegetarians will find plenty to enjoy on the menu, too; try the fresh wood ear mushrooms dressed with cilantro and chili oil (RMB 32) and the fish in the sour soup can be subbed out for wild mushrooms. Perhaps the only dish that fell flat was the eggs cooked on hot stones (RMB 48); not a bad dish as scrambled eggs go but one that felt more like a photo-friendly gimmick than a genuine innovation.

It is worth noting that these dishes and more are served by some of the friendliest, most helpful wait staff I have had the pleasure of encountering in Beijing. They will be more than happy to guide you through the tome-like menu while proffering sample shots of their homemade rice wine (which somehow manages to be both warming in winter and refreshing in summer). That, plus the quaint covered courtyard, make Private Kitchen 44 a great choice for both jaded Beijing diners and out of town guests.

Robynne Tindall



PHOTO: ROBYNNE TINDALL

P.S. WE ATE YOU

taco burger, RMB 68

Q Mex

Having won 2017's Burger Cup with their all-bases-covered range of burgers, Q Mex is gearing up once again to wow the Beijing masses with the newest addition to their meaty arsenal: the Taco Burger. In it, a spicy chorizo meat patty lays the foundation for cheese, guacamole, crispy corn chips, sliced tomato, jalapeno, and tomato mayo – a Tex-Mex combo that may see them once again ride to the top of this year's rankings.

beef platter, RMB 80

Beyond Yakitori

As part of their special weekend menu, Beyond Yakitori's three-skewer beef platter is a trio of tongue, filet, and skirt, each perfectly tender and full of buttery goodness. All are very well executed but it was the tongue that impressed most, each fatty cube of beef giving a firm but juicy bite and the smoky notes combining with the mild sprinkling of fried onions on top. Best yet, Beyond Yakitori's rotating weekend menu means that no matter when you visit, there'll always be something just as succulent waiting for you.

slow-cooked eggs with foie gras, RMB 140

Migas Mercado

Another menu that's all change is Migas Mercado's brunch specials, which have been revamped with the sunshine – and a sizeable dose of family and sharing-style cooking – heavily in mind. A highlight among the 20-plus items is the slow-cooked eggs with foie gras, a heady mix of light textures courtesy of the eggs and accompanying potato foam, and more rustic and robust flavors from the wedges of foie gras and grilled asparagus. Don't want to settle on a few dishes? Opt for the RMB 390 tasting menu instead.

mexican wrestling wrap, RMB 68

Tribe

Probably our favorite dish on Tribe's new spring menu, the Mexican Wrestling Wrap is what your cobbled-together homestyle dinner fajitas would be if made by a trained chef. That's to say, it's incredibly comforting and stuffed with all sorts of tasty elements, including marinated chicken leg with a hint of spice, bell peppers, tomatoes, avocado, coriander, and kale. The whole grain flavor of the wrap, which includes buckwheat, spelt, and black sesame, acts as the cherry on the top of this admittedly health-addled cake.





GUARDIAN ART CENTER

CHINA'S OLDEST AUCTION HOUSE FINDS A WORTHY HOME IN OLE SCHEEREN'S LATEST CREATION

Daily 10am-6pm. 1 Wangfujing Street, Dongcheng District

嘉德艺术中心：东城区王府井大街1号

Credited as being the first auction house to arise out of modern China, China Guardian's new Büro Ole Scheeren custom-built headquarters in the heart of Beijing serves as an understated emblem of its growing stature at home and abroad. Located across from the National Art Museum of China (NAMOC), Scheeren's two-volume glass and granite Guardian Art Center stands assured in its cultural understanding and makes for a worthy hub of exchange for some of China's finest classical artworks.

As anyone who has walked a block in the capital knows, the city has in modern times favored utility over

distinct aesthetics, a stance again renewed by president Xi Jinping's attack on "weird buildings" in 2014 which went as far as to single out Scheeren's striking and now decade-old CCTV Headquarters. To that end, the Guardian Art Center makes a conscious effort to incorporate design elements from Chinese art within the greater context of its surroundings.

The 14-story structure is deceptively compact and is divided by its two principal applications: a venue for the appreciation and sale of art, and a lifestyle center. The lower pixelated volume is comprised of the Guardian's auction house, offices, and exhibition spaces, and its


PHOTOS COURTESY OF BÜRO OLE SCHEEREN

facade draws from its proximity – the low-lying hutongs – mirroring the gray hue, height-for-height scale, and earthy finish of Beijing’s antiquated but rapidly changing dwellings.

However, the center’s most distinct feature is its commanding upper volume, a suspended monolithic square ring of interlocking brick-like reflective glass panes that encircles the hotel’s inner courtyard. The innermost single loaded corridor connects the 120 boutique hotel rooms, and a number of restaurants and bars, affording views of the nearby Forbidden City and outer-lying mountains. As indicative of Guardian China’s clout, guests will also soon enjoy direct subway access to the complex via the yet-to-be opened NAMOC stop.

With recent news of collaboration between London’s Serpentine Gallery and Jiakun Architects to construct a pavilion in Beijing’s downtown Wangfujing, 2018 is proving an exciting time for art and architecture in the city. As an innovative example of a cultural institution yet to grace Beijing’s controlled structural landscape, the Guardian Art Center serves as a worthy monument to China’s growing influence in the art world. What’s more, the center also serves a reminder of what modern architecture can achieve when it successfully navigates the mercurial design of Chinese politics. *Tom Arnstein*

THE LOWER PORTION OF THE BUILDING IS REDOLENT OF THE HUTONGS NEARBY



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CAN YOU EAT SPICY?

**THE BEIJINGER'S INAUGURAL HOT & SPICY FESTIVAL
LANDS APR 14-15 AT GALAXY SOHO**

Following the success of our annual Hot Chili Pepper Eating Contest and the crowds that came to see competitors sweat it out in the name of ring-of-fire fun, this year we've decided to go one step further and offer the same experience to you, the Beijing masses, with our inaugural Hot & Spicy Festival!

Come Apr 14-15, crowds will gather in Chaoyangmen's Galaxy Soho to munch their way through the spiciest selection of grub that the city's top F&B purveyors have to offer. More than 40 vendors representing cuisines from approximately 20 countries have been perspiring away over some of the tastiest, fieriest, and downright (pleasurably?) painful food you've ever dared to put into your pie hole. Vendors so far include the likes of Q Mex, Hatsune, Slow Boat Brewery, Spice Spirit, Pizza Marzano, Caravan, Punjabi Indian Restaurant, VSports, Homeplate, QS, Side Street Bar & Grill, Peiping Machine Taphouse, Billy's Fish & Chips, NBeer Pub, Legend Beer, and many more.

Of course, we'll also have the best beers in town to put out the fire inside alongside music and cultural performances to get you hot under the collar all over again. There'll also be onsite games to distract you

for when the burn gets to be just a little too much. Then there's our eighth annual Hot Chili Pepper Eating Contest, where the most daring of Beijing's chili eaters will consume the world's hottest peppers for prizes and sweat-drenched bragging rights.

As an incentive to get your tickets early (apart from them being cheaper, guaranteeing your spot at the festival, and allowing quicker access to the venue upon arrival), we're also giving away a limited edition Hot & Spicy branded bandana with every presale ticket. The bandanas will also go some way to helping you fulfill this year's Hot & Spicy dress code: Hot and spicy! Got a favorite chili? Wear it. Got something hot? Own it. Like to add a little spice to your wardrobe? Make us sweat!

The Beijinger Hot & Spicy Festival runs the weekend of Apr 14-15, 11am-8pm, at Galaxy Soho. For advanced tickets (RMB 20) and access to a free limited edition Hot & Spicy bandana on the day, simply scan the QR code to the right.



PHOTO: UNI YOU

GO

VANCOUVER // SPICY DESSERTS // ARTISANAL PRODUCTS // SELF-HEATING HOT POTS



THE EIGHTH BEIJING INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

*This year's Beijing International Film Festival touches down with a tantalizing mix of award season favorites such as *Get Out*, *Call Me By Your Name*, *The Disaster Artist*, and *The Florida Project* as well as this year's special programs, which pay tribute to female filmmakers as well as several acclaimed directors, including Ingmar Bergman (a still from his iconic *The Seventh Seal* is pictured above), Wong Kar-wai, Wes Anderson, and Pedro Almodovar. There'll also be a section dedicated to the X-Men franchise as well as showings of all four Jurassic Park movies. Various venues and prices. More info at www.bjiff.com*

PHOTO: INGMARBERGMAN.SE

GET OUT

VANCOUVER

URBAN SOPHISTICATION AND UNTAMED NATURE ON YOUR DOORSTEP

By Robynne Tindall



Vancouver may seem like a strange choice for a column about short breaks from Beijing. Yet, with 10-hour direct flights on Air Canada or Air China, both of which offer frequent discount fares as low as RMB 3,000 return, a trip to Canada can work out cheaper than flights to Bangkok. Add easily accessible skiing and hiking, reasonably priced eating and drinking, and a cosmopolitan art and music scene, and you may find yourself wondering why you haven't already visited.

What to do

One of the great joys of the Pacific Northwest region of Canada and the US is its wide-open spaces, something which Vancouver has in abundance, even within walking distance of downtown. Magnificent Stanley Park offers 1,000 acres of trails, lakes, and attractions – stray off the main paths and you'll find it hard to believe you are in the center of a major city. Don't miss the First Nations totem poles, accompanied by fascinating information about the First Nations families who lived in the Stanley Park area as recently as the 1930s. Tracing the edge of Stanley Park is

the Seawall, the world's longest uninterrupted waterfront path at 28km. The route is divided into two sections, one for walkers and runners, and one for cyclists. Once you understand how closely outdoor exercise is ingrained in the local psyche you'll understand why athleisure brand Lululemon was founded in Vancouver (you can still visit the brand's original store at 2101 West 4th Ave in Kitsilano).

If you'd prefer a more downtown experience (or want to reward yourself after a long day of alfresco exercise), take a brief ferry ride across False Creek to Granville Island, a former industrial site that has been reinvented as a trendy neighborhood full of restaurants, shops, and galleries. The main draw is Granville Island Public Market, which is packed with stalls selling local produce and craft foods. One of the most popular spots is Lee's Donuts, which has been a staple of the market for nearly 40 years.

What to eat

Vancouver is a truly multicultural city, a fact reflected in the city's many and varied restaurants, where chefs blend their own culinary traditions with seafood and

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA



produce from around British Columbia. Take stylish Pidgin, for example, where the menu seamlessly blends Asian and French influences and the prix fixe is great value at CAD 55 per person. Another inexpensive way to sample the city's excellent dining scene is to head for happy hour at farm-to-table restaurant Wildebeest, when you can order up interesting plates like pan-roasted mussels from Saltspring Island for CAD 12 and pints of local ales for CAD 5. For something a little more casual, Vancouver's best sandwiches can be found at Meat & Bread, where they have perfected the art of roast pork with crispy crackling. Grab one to go and eat it after a walk around Stanley Park.

Where to stay

Socially conscious Skwachàys Lodge has 18 suites designed by First Nations artists, whose work is also available to peruse and purchase in the gallery on the ground floor. It's a boutique experience at a surprisingly reasonable price (rooms from CAD 189 per night). The hotel is within easy walking distance of the landmarks in

Gastown and Chinatown. If you want to stay in an actual landmark, splash out on The Fairmont Hotel Vancouver, located in an iconic castle-like edifice in the heart of downtown, opened by visiting UK royals in 1939. Its timeless elegance comes with all the modern comforts one would expect from any Fairmont Hotel.

Further afield

If Stanley Park isn't outdoorsy enough for you, the North Shore suburb of Vancouver (around a 30-minute drive away) offers skiing and other alpine activities on Grouse Mountain, hikes through temperate rainforests, and photo ops on the Capilano Suspension Bridge. Keen skiers might consider making the one-and-a-half-hour drive to Whistler. If you have access to a car, you could also consider crossing the border into the US and driving the two-and-a-half-hours to Seattle (note that the border crossing will add anything from a few minutes to a few hours to your journey time), where you can enjoy freshly caught seafood and a glass of local Washington wine at one of the restaurants and bars in Pike Place Market.



WHEN SWEET MEETS SPICE

BEIJING'S HOTTEST DESSERTS FOR A FIERY DATE

By Tracy Wang

Spices have a magical power, an inherent force that tantalizes the consumer and lures them back over and over again. We readily admit to being such willing recipients of spice's punishment, a throbbing deeply rooted in our senses. So you can imagine our delight when we discovered that a number of Beijing's proprietors have undertaken the lord's work (or the devil's) in making desserts that combine fiery pain with the addictive rush that only sugar can provide. Below are Beijing's best desserts to leave a lasting impression on you and your now swollen-lipped beau.



Spicy Fruit Éclair – Xberk

Using a traditional Yunnanese method of mixing slices of fruit with chili, Xberk goes one step further and merges it with a classic French pastry: the éclair. In this delicate but robust dessert, preserved strawberry and pineapple cubes sit atop a lady's finger covered in whipped cream and mingle with a vigorous helping of chili flakes, fresh birds-eye chilies, lemon and lime rinds, thyme, and sea salt. Each bite of these éclairs is a journey through Yunnan cuisine, bursting with spicy sweet, fruity, and salty flavors, and a strong zesty jolt to finish.

Flavor of Chocolate with Chili – Combal

This spicy dessert is the equivalent of a souped-up and deconstructed Ferrero Rocher-Mars bar hybrid, which is to say that it's our dream version of both. Presented like a work of art, cones of milk and white chocolate and meringue sit in the center under a meticulous dusting of chili powder. Each heaped spoonful of creamy chocolate, chili, and salty biscuit base is an indulgent combination that the scoop of vanilla ice cream does little to temper, but oh how gloriously it cools off the tailing hint of chili.

Spicy Eggs in a Bird's Nest – Chat Room Café

This delicacy sits among other sweet and savory treats on Chat Room's three-layered iron tower tea set. The nest is made using countless threads of deep-fried pastry which act as a haven for several chocolate truffles. In contrast to the crispness of the pastry, the soft chocolate balls are peppered with chocolate chips for an extra bite and dusted with cacao powder, peppercorn powder, and sea salt to give a luxurious mix of sweet, savory, and spicy notes, heightened by the accompanying deep-fried peppermint leaves.



Coco Cici – Pak Pak

Pak Pak's spicy Thai-inspired take on a chocolate mousse features a smooth texture, a dense but moist base, bucket-loads of chocolatey goodness, and is topped with whipped cream, caramelized banana, shards of dried coconut, and a tinge of chili pepper for a little added tropical flavor and a lingering smoldering on the palate. The accompanying scoop of homemade coconut (or durian) ice cream take the flavors to a whole new level.



Hazelnut, Mango, and Peppercorn Cake – Blanko Café

Served on a stylish plate and with a golden fork, Blanko Café's chocolate mousse immediately makes a statement, namely, you better be eating this on a hot date. The mousse is covered in a sumptuous ganache, a white chocolate frame, and a single piece of gold foil on top. Once you've dug in, the center parts to show its layered core of hazelnut and vanilla cream, mango jelly with Cointreau and peppercorn powder, hazelnut chips, and an almond biscuit cake. The combination of textures works seamlessly and the unabashed sweetness is balanced with the kick from the peppercorns and a subtle hint of booze.



JARRING FLAVORS

THE BEST OF BEIJING'S ARTISANAL PRODUCTS IN A POT

By Tautvile Daugelaite

The abundance of flavors and scents in Beijing's streets and restaurants can be overwhelming; from the steam that laps your face via the boiling chili oil of a hot pot to the brisk crunch of a morning *jianbing*, our fair city is rich with food for the senses. That same sentiment also stretches to the less visible but no less talented artisans of jarred goodies.

Below, we dive spoon-first into the jams, pickles, spreads, and tapenades that you may not have suspected existing in the capital but come in handy when cravings of home come calling.



Bonne Nani Jams

Bonne Nani Jams position themselves as 'homemade French jams and chutneys' and use mostly organic and locally grown fruit and vegetables. Their extensive product list can be found via their WeChat store but bestsellers include their onion, mango, and tomato chutneys as well as the sweeter mango, melon, and apricot jams which are laced with blends of ginger, goji, saffron, or cardamom.

We tried: Tomato chutney

We said: Quite sweet and a great shortcut for preparing a delicious meal by frying it with meat and/or veggies and serving with rice. Also, if you have kids who need to be tricked into eating more greens, this chutney will do most of the work.

Prices: Jams, pestos, and chutneys (RMB 80-130)

WeChat contact: CN69696969696969

Bubba's Pantry

As the name indicates, Bubba's will satisfy all your pantry needs; from simple pickled cucumbers and sauerkraut to more exotic pickled quail eggs, cured salmon, and rum-cured bacon. If that doesn't satisfy your pickling inclinations, Bubba's is also open to custom orders.

We tried: Kimchi

We said: Less sour and spicy than your average supermarket-bought kimchi. Proving quite fresh at the time of eating, if you're looking for a heartier kick from your fermented cabbage, leave it out of the fridge for a day.

Prices: Meat (RMB 55 for 100g); jars (RMB 40)

WeChat contact: DrewEzell





Jar Jar Minx

Charlotte White is the mastermind behind Jar Jar Minx and brings some DIY attitude to the jar scene. Her creations include smoked chili, lemon-hazelnut, and olive tapenades; chipotle-strawberry, balsamic vinegar, and bacon-date jams; as well as jerky and a handful of infused liquors that had us saying "Why didn't we think of this?" True to Jar Jar Minx's homemade ethos, White also delivers the orders herself.

We tried: Smoked chili tapenade

We said: Meaty and very rich, with a distinctive smoky taste. Best put on bread, nachos, vegetables, or eat simply by the spoonful (like we did once we ran out of the above).

Prices: Jars (RMB 40 for 100ml, RMB 70 for 200ml); other items (RMB 30-100)

WeChat contact: CharLouise

Halo Hummus

Familiar to market-goers and hummus revolutionaries alike, Nicole Bonnah's 'innocent dipping' hummus has been making the rounds for a while now but looks to get an even bigger boost soon thanks to a collaboration with food incubator Hatchery. Those favoring classic combinations will enjoy Halo Hummus' sundried tomato and paprika hummus, while the more adventurous can opt for a layered pot of spicy jerk chicken and hummus.

We tried: Jalapeño hummus

We said: Very light compared to the usual 'layer-of-oil' hummus and featuring more of a lemony kick over pure jalapeño spice. One small pot will most likely vanish in one sitting, so we'd recommend stocking up.

Prices: 350g, 400g, 490g (RMB 50-85)

WeChat contact: NicoleBonnah



Parwaaz: Spice Route Concepts

Thanks to creator Reshma Khan, Indian spices are finding new homes and combinations in Beijing via Parwaaz's chutneys, pickles, and spice blends. Choose between lime, eggplant, and cilantro pickles; mango, tomato, and onion chutneys as well as various curry pastes. Besides those, they also have warming masala chai mixes and cooling mint chai.

We tried: Eggplant pickle

We said: Certainly not made for the spice-averse, notes of chili prevail in this rich mix of eggplant (mainly for texture) as well as ginger, cumin, and mustard, creating a solid base for a full flavor punch.

Prices: Curry pastes (RMB 50); tea blends (RMB 80); pickles and chutneys (RMB 100-120)

WeChat contact: Reshma-Khan

TRACING HEATED ROOTS

HOW THE BELOVED CHILI ARRIVED IN CHINA

By Jeremiah Jenne

I was eating hot pot with a group of Chinese friends recently. As is my custom, I ordered the spiciest oiliest hell broth on the menu, a fiendish concoction of (I'm-sure-it-wasn't) gutter oil, Sichuan peppercorns, and, of course, a veritable red slush of chili peppers. I was soon sweating like a poodle humping Chris Farley in a woodstove and releasing noxious gas so horrific that it may have violated the Geneva Protocol. It was awesome.

The domesticated chili pepper, *Capsicum annuum*: It is about the pleasure of pain, a masochistic rush of released endorphins and sweaty upper lips. It is nearly impossible to imagine Sichuan Cuisine (or Indian or Thai) without the humble chili, and yet until 500 years ago, the chili was unknown to chefs in this part of the world.

This venerable spice, the devil's own, was part of a great

global shifting of crops, animals, people (and disease) known as the Columbian Exchange. Starting in the 15th and 16th century, conquerors and explorers from Western Europe took chili peppers, papayas, peanuts, tobacco, tomatoes, corn, and hundreds of other species from the Americas and introduced them to the trade routes of Asia.

Meanwhile, apples, coffee, citrus fruits, onions, cattle, pigs, and horses made the trip in the other direction.

At the same time, millions of people – many against their will – also traveled between the continents taking their culinary culture and favorite ingredients with them from one part of the globe to the other.

Enter the chili.

I've had knock-down arguments with fellow capsaicin connoisseurs on the provenance of our preferred pepper.



PHOTO: BEC-TERO

When I tell my dining companions that their mighty chili is not native – is, in fact, like me a foreigner to their shores – they look at me as if wondering, is it possible that this *Lao Wai* is intentionally hurting the feelings of 1.3 billion people?

Chili peppers have been part of the culinary culture of the Americas for almost 10,000 years. According to a study published by the National Academy of Sciences in 2014, the earliest evidence of domestication occurred nearly 5,000 years ago in what is today Mexico.

Spanish and Portuguese explorers to the Caribbean basin encountered chilies, which they identified with the black pepper, a separate plant species, because of its spicy palate. They brought samples back to Europe, first as ornamental plants and then for adding a little extra kick to their food and an Old World culinary revolution was underway.

Once chilies started appearing in the markets and bazaars of the Indian Ocean trading ports, their use spread rapidly throughout South Asia and into China, Korea, and Japan.

According to an article published in 2005 by two Chinese researchers in the journal *Agricultural History of China*, the first record of chilies in the Middle Kingdom is from a 1671 gazetteer in Zhejiang province: "It is red and can be used for seasoning." There is another reference in 1682 from Liaoning, the coastal orientation of these early chili adopters providing some evidence for the chilies' arrival by sea. The pepper-popping people of Hunan – Mao was reportedly a capsaicin devotee – record that chilies appeared in their province in 1684.

Surprisingly, the first reference in a Sichuan isn't until 1749 although given the trauma Sichuan endured in the 17th century (the province suffered a severe population decline because of wars and rebellions during that period) the relatively late record might not be the best indicator of when the chili arrived in Chongqing.

Why did some parts of China adopt and adapt chilies while others gave the pepper a hard pass? Notably, Guangdong and Zhejiang, despite being two places chilies arrived first in China, eschew spice in their cuisine. And yet in Hunan and Sichuan – the two spice rivals – chilies are more than just a source of heat in the meat but are an integral part of local culture and lingo.

Both share the *la meizi* and *hong lajiao* archetypes of women who know a couple of different ways to turn up the heat. Both have cities notorious for damp weather where nothing wards off the baleful influence of cooling than a little hot spice in the soup.

But whether it's about the women or the weather, the chili has become a staple of some of China's most famous regional cuisines. After 500 years of nuking otherwise boring vegetables and semi-palatable animal parts, who cares where the chili originated, it's most likely here to stay.

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INSTANT LA

THE BEST OF CHINA'S SELF-HEATING HOT POTS

By Andrew Little

You may not have heard, but there has been a momentous development in the world of instant food. Instant noodles have now encounter a seriously bulky competitor in the battle for China's go-to mobile meals in the form of the self-heating hot pot, literally translated from Chinese as "convenient hot pot" (*fangbian huoguo*).

And really, it's hard to imagine something more convenient than this. As the name suggests, these boxes of on-the-spot culinary perfection cook themselves without the crutch of an outside heating source. Instead, each package includes a flameless heat pack that you simply submerge in water à la an army MRE except here the battlegrounds are China's train stations and internet cafés. Then there are the ingredients: a variation on the theme of meat, vegetables, tofu, and noodles that you would expect at any other hot pot occasion. With cooking times ranging from 5-15 minutes, these might not be quite as "instant" as their noodle relative, but waiting 15 minutes for hot pot without a flame in sight? This may be the height of science as we know it, folks.

In one steam-filled afternoon, we went ahead and tried the top five rated hot pots on TMall, much to the chagrin of our office and anyone else who didn't want to leave work smelling like they had just spent a day in a Haidilao branded coworking space.

Finally, two pieces of advice before you get cooking: 1) setting these up for the first time can seem overwhelming, especially with the added obstacle of the Chinese language, but don't worry, the diagrams are foolproof, and 2) it's best to put the flavor base in the container first and be sure to cook for at least the directed time, if not longer.



Spicy Beef Natural Hot Pot by Zi Hai Guo (自嗨锅), RMB 34.8

The beauty of Zi Hai Guo's Spicy Beef Natural Hotpot is that it delivers almost exactly what you'd expect out of a proper, spicy beef hot pot – a thick, Chongqing aroma, a good meat-to-vegetable ratio, and a container large enough to hold a decent reservoir of soup. Probably the most exciting ingredient provided is the pack of Sichuan peppercorns, labeled as *chudian*, or literally, "electric shock," which means you're in control of how mouth-numbing you want your meal to be.

Highlights: Sichuan peppercorns, 5-minute cooking time, and the chopsticks (they're fancy enough to be reusable)

Rock Hot Pot by Wei Shu Wu (魏蜀吴), RMB 24.8

Slightly less spicy than Spicy Beef Natural, but still packing a punch, Wei Shu Wu's Rock Hot Pot also employs a fairly standard hot pot flavor – and what's wrong with that? What allows the Rock Hot Pot's classic flavor to shine are the potato slices, which after absorbing the broth for 15 minutes may be the prized ingredient in its compact box. That latter point means that to its advantage, it's more portable, but to its detriment, it's actually a challenge to fit all of the ingredients in. Oh, and then there's the entire chicken sausage – slice it yourself and add to the mix or eat it as it comes.

Highlights: Potato slices, compact size, chicken sausage



Chongqing Natural Hotpot by Mala Duo Na (麻辣多拿), RMB 24.8

The best starting point for discussing Ma La Duo Na's Chongqing Natural Hotpot are its chicken wings. Juicy and most likely marinated before packaging, the wings are the signature feature of Chongqing Natural and arguably the winning attribute of any of the pots we tried. Largely responsible for the flavor of the wings is the pot's base sauce – more grainy and earthy than the others, this one is also more numbing. The noodles, chewy but firm, are also on point.

Highlights: Chicken wings, the noodles, compact size



Time-Honored Hotpot by Youdian Huo (有点火), RMB 34.8

Youdian Huo's Time-Honored Hotpot sports a classier, more serious look than the others, but it really needs to loosen up. The pot is mildly spicy, making it suitable for those who enjoy the experience of spice without the heat. While it doesn't have much of a kick, some of its ingredients, like the corn and luncheon meat, make it more interesting (yay, Spam!). However, this one was a let-down since the overall flavor does not match the grandeur of the packaging. Tip: Cook this one for closer to 20 minutes.

Highlights: Large size, mild spiciness, the noodles

Spicy Tender Beef Hot Pot by Haidilao (海底捞), RMB 39.9

Finally, we come to the Spicy Tender Beef Hot Pot by the revered Haidilao hot pot chain heavyweight. In the same way that its restaurants are known for their extraordinary service, Haidilao's Spicy Tender Beef Hot Pot's presentation is superb. The pot's packaging goes for a gold-standard look and is the most entertaining to watch cook thanks to its slick shape and significant steam. Unfortunately, the presentation seems to be the most notable feature of the hot pot chain's product. The mildly spicy taste itself, while not poor, is nothing memorable and has got nothing on a trip to the real deal.

Highlights: Presentation, large size, mild spiciness



BEIJING, WHERE THE STREETS ARE FILLED WITH SPICE

By Tracy Wang

Beijing may be far removed from the spicy south but our fine city still has its fair share of tongue-numbing and saliva-inducing street eats. In fact, we'd go as far as to say that if you know where to look, the streets are filled with spice. These are our favorite six (for the best results, round each mouthful out with a swig of ice-cold beer).

Malatang 麻辣烫

From a humble hole in the wall where patrons stand around a large tank filled with spicy broth and *chuan'r*, to fancy joints where each ingredient is prepackaged in a small bag, the spirit of *malatang* is always the same, which is why it has so many devotees. Pick your (healthy) poison, throw it in chili broth, add thick sesame paste, and begin your deep dig for each greasy morsel. For a DIY experience, try *malatang's* cousin in spice, *chuanchuanxiang* (串串香).

Where to eat: Nemo & Bu, Zhang Liang



Spicy Duck Neck 麻辣鸭脖

If you have had a chance to travel on a slow train in China, you're likely to have spotted travelers excitedly tearing open bags of spicy duck necks and duck livers, before nibbling on them all the way to their destination so as to kill the boredom. Originally from Wuhan, the inch-long chunks are mild on the first bite, and then the spicy aromas slowly kick in and leave with a lingering sweet and burning feel, thanks to up to 50 different herbs and spices they use to marinate.

Where to eat: Lu Meimei, Wan'r Chuan'r





Spicy Crayfish 麻辣小龙虾

The main attraction of long, idle nights out of the street, spicy crayfish draws foodies from Beijing and beyond to queue up in endless lines on Gui Jie. Ignore the cold, garlic, non-spicy renditions and go straight for the *mala* special. Whether baked, steamed, braised, or stewed in chilies, herbs, and spices, these little beauties couldn't be more inviting thanks to their crimson color and addictive hot punch. Expect proceedings to get very messy.

Where to eat: Hua's Restaurant, Huda Restaurant, Mala Youhuo (Spice Spirit)

Spicy Stinky Tofu 麻辣臭豆腐

As with a number of dishes on this list, to call stinky tofu divisive might be a major understatement. Nevertheless, it would be a sin to omit this gem from a spicy street eats roundup. A typical roadside snack in Hunan province (Chairman Mao's native soil), spicy tofu is made from soybeans and brined with various herbs before being fermented and deep-fried. The real deal comes as black cubes with a golden, crisp, and crusty exterior, and a soft, piping-hot center. Those chunks are topped off with a layer of fiery toppings such as fresh red chilies and sour preserved bamboo shoots to reduce some of the greasiness.

Where to eat: Yangyuxing, Wangxiangyuan, Karaiya Spice House



Spicy Brain 麻辣脑花

Love it or loathe it, brain can act as a nourishing protein-rich supplement to your diet and as is often espoused by traditional Chinese medicine, you can expect feasting on it to have a beneficial effect on your associated organ, namely: your noggin. A signature dish in Sichuan, spicy pig brain is usually added to hot pot to cook alongside mountains of spices and oil, numbing your senses to the point that you can't even really taste it. The texture is soft like jelly and smooth enough to swallow without chewing, meaning that the burn can travel unhindered all the way down your esophagus.

Where to eat: Brain Factory, Nao Chan Fen'er

Spicy Rabbit Head 麻辣兔头

For those of you always on the lookout for an adventure, you might want to test your guts with the *crème de la crème* of spicy Chinese food: rabbit heads (sans the cutesy ears). Simply put on a pair of plastic gloves, crack their little skulls open, ignore the teeth (and the soft caress of its tongue), and hunt for the meager meat hidden between the bones. Thankfully, the skulls are marinated long enough to be easily pliable but be warned, the bones can be lava-hot and have the potential to bite back unlike anything else you've sunk your teeth into.

Where to eat: Shuangliu Laoma Rabbit Head, Laojietu



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THE HORMONES

Apr 14 – Leading up to the release of their debut album, *Beckon*, *The Hormones* wrap up a 20-date China tour with one final date in Beijing. These four ladies from Chengdu are making waves in the country's post-punk scene and have only matured since their founding in 2011, recently working to hone their craft with Tim DeWit, former producer and drummer of New York's Gang Gang Dance (who also happens to be on the bill). Expect a renewed focus and songs that are sultry and melancholic as much as they are barbed and fraught when they touch down in the capital.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FAKE MUSIC MEDIA

PAUL FRENCH

'MIDNIGHT IN PEKING' AUTHOR TALKS ABOUT HIS NEW SHANGHAI-BASED CRIME THRILLER

By Tom Arnstein

What was it like writing about Shanghai in your new book *City of Devils* versus Beijing in *Midnight in Peking*?

The darker side of 1930s foreign Peking was hidden and had never before been seriously written about – indeed the entire old Badlands area around what is now Chuanban and Hougou hutongs had been effectively forgotten by everyone. Shanghai's foreign criminal underbelly was enormous by comparison – dozens of gangs, literally hundreds of casinos, cabarets, bars, dancehalls, opium dens, and restaurants. The problem in 1930s Peking was finding anything on a comparatively few people. The challenge in 1940s Shanghai is not producing a 3,000-page book!

How do you go about finding subjects to write about? What drew you to choose Joe Farren and Jack Riley as the protagonists in *City of Devils*?

I start with the city, the period, and the world. In *Midnight in Peking* it was Beijing at the time of the Japanese occupation and the contrast between the law-abiding Legation Quarter-centered foreign community and the riff-raff, driftwood, and criminals who lived out in the eastern Tartar City. From there I found a murder. In *City of Devils*, I wanted to explore the legendarily louche Shanghai of the late 1930s up to Pearl Harbor and the fall of the city. I needed a story, characters who embodied that world. Joe Farren was a Jewish Viennese exhibition dancer and choreographer turned casino boss; Jack Riley escaped from an American prison, flooded Shanghai with slot machines, made a fortune and invested it in Joe's casino. It was always bound to end badly.

What resources did you rely on most to ensure you were telling the real tale of Shanghai's murky underworld?

I focused initially on the old records of the Shanghai Municipal Police and the city's courts. The newspapers of the time were seriously tabloid and captured every fight, murder, robbery, and riot in lurid detail. Then it's down to any memoirs left, old letters, stories told to children, grandchildren, and great-children. The physical city still exists (mostly) and so from there it's just putting all the pieces together and trying to tell a good yarn.

What were some of your favorite or unbelievable discoveries from your research?

I thought I was aware of just how crazy 1930s/early 1940s Shanghai was – we all have images in our head of the nightclubs, cabarets, bars. But it was even wilder than you can imagine – gigolo brothels for bored housewives, pornographic cinemas, nightclubs with trapeze artists, hitmen who charged only a few dollars to kill whoever you wanted while New York hitmen rode around town looking for opportunities. By 1940 the city was effectively lawless.

Finally, are there any restaurants, sights, events etc. that you miss from Beijing?

Hutongs, hutongs, hutongs ... in the 1990s when I first visited Beijing there were around 2,000 hutongs left (a thousand had already been bulldozed since 1950). When I left China that was down to around 900 and falling. Now we're down well below 600 with virtually none 100 percent intact. The Beijing hutong is unique – it's like the panda or the dodo – when you kill the last one that's it – no more, all gone. That day is perhaps not far off now.

City of Devils: The Two Men Who Ruled the Underworld of Old Shanghai is published by Penguin and out now in China.



NOCTURNES

BURGEONING BEIJING INDIE POP DUO DETAIL THEIR INDEPENDENT STREAK

By Kyle Mullin

Many bands bristle at the notion of self-promotion, especially when it comes to social media – but not the Nocturnes. One glance at the colorful, oh-so-slickly edited video for the Beijing indie pop duo's song "Echoes", from their debut LP *Lines Written in Code*, reveals an outfit that's not only talented but also unabashedly savvy.

"I used to be of the mind that the business side of things was quite sell out-y, but now I find it quite interesting," guitarist Dave Carey – who co-founded the duo with singer Wei Du aka Leslie – tells *the Beijinger* during an interview ahead of the band's Mar 31 album launch at Yue Space. He co-directed the video for "Echoes", going on to explain that his role in publicizing Nocturnes doesn't end there: "Our label is very China-based so when it comes to promoting on Instagram and Facebook it's up to me."

Not that they have any complaints in that regard. Said label is Cao Tai Music, which is quickly becoming a fixture among China's record labels. Nocturnes are the first indie act that they've signed, the result of a quite fortunate set of circumstances set off by Will Griffith of Live Beijing Music fame (and also a frequent *Beijinger* contributor), who passed along Nocturnes music to Shen Lijia, the head of electronic label Ran Music. Shen's friends at Cao Tai Music then approached Carey and Leslie with a tempting offer.

Thanks to Shen Lijia's deft mixing, *Lines Written in Code* sounds slick and modern. His background in electronica, and subtle but hands-off approach, prove to be a snug fit for Carey's lavishly soothing, effects-rife guitar and grooving production. Impressive as that sonic backdrop is, it is Leslie who frequently steals the show. Her deep and warm voice evokes embers in a hearth and will appeal to fans of both Sade and Japanese Breakfast, the latter of whom Nocturnes opened for at Yue Space back in December.

Another memorable gig that stands out in Leslie's mind was a large festival they played last year in Hebei's nondescript town of Zhangbei, largely because of two

particular faces in the crowd – her parents, both of whom had never seen her sing before. In fact, Leslie avoided serenading her family for years, despite playing in a cover band in university and harboring dreams of stepping up to the mike for adoring fans. She says her reluctance stemmed from how well her mother and other relatives could sing, recalling: "I was quite shy growing up, and never thought I was any good. Some of my relatives are Mongolian, and music was always a big thing for us. At every family gathering, they'd start singing and dancing. I hated it!"

Despite that, Leslie says her parents were very supportive after seeing her perform for the first time, something that defies the old cliché about Chinese (or otherwise) rockers rebelling against strict parents. Her father, an English teacher, was especially impressed with her knack for penning and singing English lyrics. Instead, in a surprising twist, Carey was the one who had to buck against traditions. He says: "There's actually a lot of familial pressure in Irish society. My family really wanted me to be a doctor because that's the respectable thing. But I hate needles; I faint at the site of blood! My grandmother and I argued about this for a long time: 'You can be in a cover band and do music as a hobby—'"

"And just play weddings!" Leslie interjects with a playful scoff, as the duo is often wont to do in conversation.

For Carey, that free-spirited sentiment is reflected on the moody, smoldering *Lines Written in Code* number "We Will Change the Running Flow", which he says is "about going against the tide of what's expected of you."

Yes, be it self-promotion, overcoming their fears, or bucking societal pressure, the pair have found far more fulfillment in not going with the flow, but instead changing it. "That's one of the reasons why Leslie and I get along, we share a viewpoint about following this path that a lot of people don't think is stable," Carey says. "It's within this instability that we find the best of one another, and the songs we make aren't despite the challenges that a career in music provides, but rather come as a result."



JENNYTHA RAJ

CRAFT BEER MASTER AND EVANGELIST

By Tautvile Daugelaite

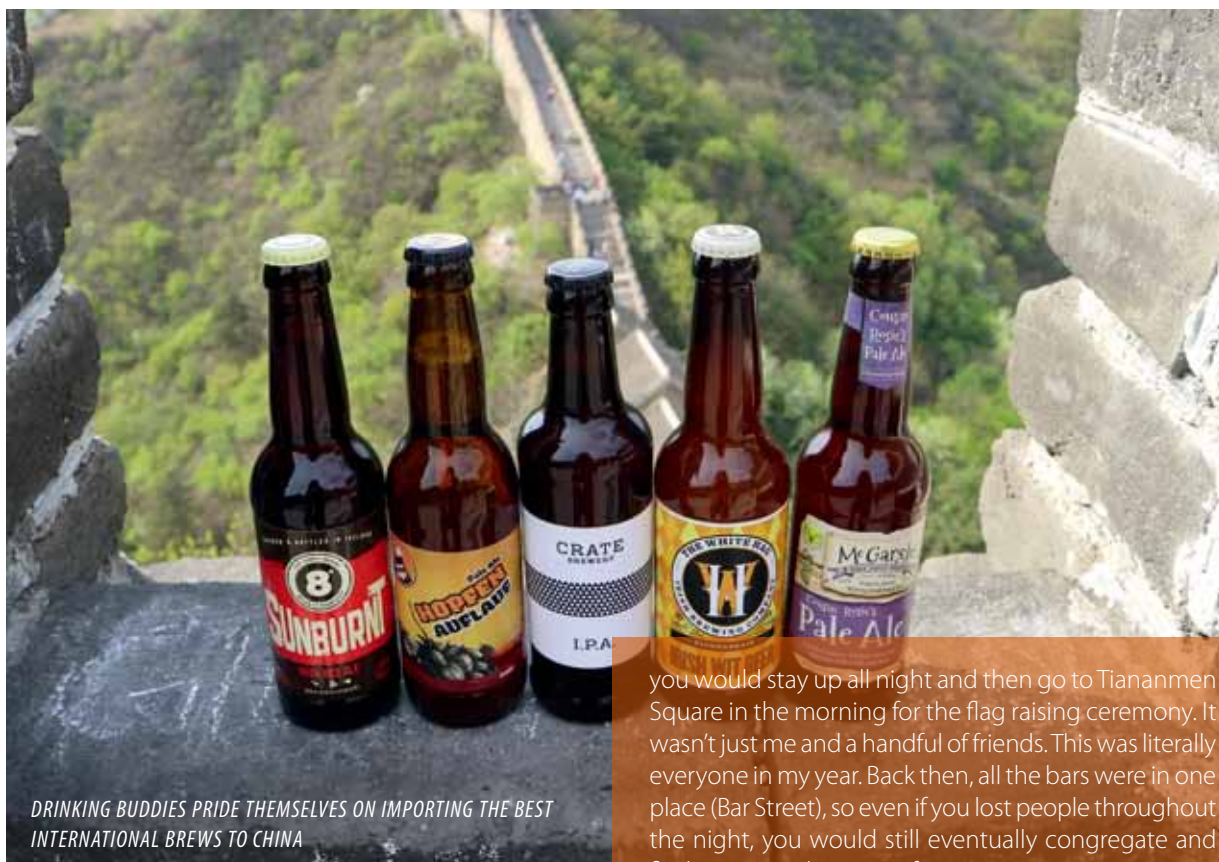
Our love for craft beer is nestled firmly in our hearts (or stomachs) and its growing popularity only serves to help carve out even more niches and allow each of us to discover our particular favorite. One of the people responsible for Beijing's now astounding abundance of craft beers, is Jennytha Raj, co-founder of the beer subscription service and club Drinking Buddies. Besides their online beer supermarket, Drinking Buddies offers a monthly delivery service of six different beers from small breweries around the world, accompanied by tasting notes and exclusive member events. When we got in touch, Raj was researching breweries in London (which doesn't count as work in our book), and kindly agreed to share some of her insights from the burgeoning world of craft beer.

Let's start with Drinking Buddies. Has beer always been an important part of your life and when did you notice a market for beer subscriptions in Beijing?

We started thinking about Drinking Buddies at the end of 2015. I was in London at the time and around then it was having a massive boom. I grew up in China as well, so I knew that for a very long time there was not so much going on. When I was in China, there wasn't even Great Leap Brewery, the first brewery to open in Beijing. So, this idea had been simmering for some time, and why people weren't able to drink beer from around the world in China just didn't make sense to me. We were thinking about the online store for a while ... however, when we started telling people about the delivery service, they



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JENNYTHA RAJ



began signing up before we even had a name or a website and we realized that had to come first. People just loved the idea.

Did you start the business more for your love of beer or the fact that you saw an opening in the market?

The beer has always been a passion. Meet me here in London and you'll see where I hang out – breweries. Crate Brewery in Hackney was a part of our first import and it is my spot. I can sit here for five hours, eating pizza and drinking beer. All these breweries have their unique styles and are just as focused on pursuing their own thing. It also helps that they are always nice and friendly.

Once you return to Beijing, what will be the first place you go for a drink?

To be fair, I sit next to a fridge of beer in my office, so it will probably be one of my own.

What was the most ridiculous or memorable adventure you found yourself in via drinking?

It was a long time ago, when I was growing up in Beijing. I was pretty sensible up until then. We used to have a tradition at our school, when on graduation day

you would stay up all night and then go to Tiananmen Square in the morning for the flag raising ceremony. It wasn't just me and a handful of friends. This was literally everyone in my year. Back then, all the bars were in one place (Bar Street), so even if you lost people throughout the night, you would still eventually congregate and find every single person from your year in Tiananmen at about five in the morning watching the flags rise. I feel bad for the people who were actually there to enjoy the ceremony.

What was your go-to drink of 2017?

I was really loving black IPAs last year. I was drinking all the black IPAs we had, but if I saw that someone was doing one, I would go for theirs as well. This year it will probably be NEIPA (New England IPA). We imported one at the end of last year and it sold out within two weeks. It looks like orange juice, which is quite fascinating.

What three of your own beers would you put out as your favorites?

Crate IPA, obviously, as well as Canediguerra Porter, and 8-Degrees Nomad.

Is there something that you are especially looking forward to bringing to Beijing?

Yes, but I cannot tell you.

Find Drinking Buddies at www.drinkingbuddies.cn or follow their official WeChat account by searching: 啤友 汇DrinkingBuddies

SAHRA MALIK

SHANGRILA FARMS CO-FOUNDER AND CEO DISCUSSES HER DEEP CHINA ROOTS

By Kyle Mullin

At 37 years old, Sahra Malik might seem too young to be an “old China hand.” However, the decade that the Shangrila Farms co-founder and CEO and her family have spent in China has arguably been more impactful than most expats who have lived here far longer.

For starters, there’s the success that Sahra, her sister Alia, and her brother Safi (all of whom are half Pakistani and half American and grew up in New York) have attained with the Shangrila Farms brand, supplying 100 hotels and 200 restaurants with their organic wares. Among those clients are renowned high-end restaurants in Beijing like TRB and Opera Bombana, major chains like Wagas, and hotels like Shangri-La, Park Hyatt, and The Opposite House.

But that’s not all. Their farm in Shangri-La county, Yunnan, began as a social enterprise brand in 2009. Malik recalls how she and her family saw it as an opportunity to “increase income for Yunnan farmers by marketing and distributing local superior products under a scalable platform.” However, the organic coffee beans and honey that they grew with their Yunnanese friends became such a hit that “soon after we realized the potential of this coffee project as well as a way to support rural communities in beautiful Yunnan.” That prompted Malik to quit her gig in advertising and manage their growing coffee business. At the same time, her sister Alia started working on honey with other Shangrila county farmers. In January 2010 the sisters partnered together, and, as Sahra explains, became



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAHRA MALIK

"a natural products company that sells organic coffee, natural and pure exotic honey, all natural fruit preserves, and handcrafted skincare products."

Those inroads made by Malik and her siblings made in Shangri-La are akin to their parents' endeavors, which began when their father, Khalid Malik, was posted as United Nations Resident Coordinator in China in 2003, bringing his family in tow. Two years later, their mother, Carter Malik, founded the Yunnan Mountain Handicraft Centre in the heart of Shangri-La's historic old town. "It became a place to learn about and celebrate the local ethnic diversity and cultural heritage. We set up a second home base in Shangri-La and often traveled there," Malik fondly recalls, adding: "Over time, we established relationships with craftspeople, farmers, and suppliers in the area." And after seeing the poverty that their Yunnanese friends endured, the Maliks were compelled to start Shangrila Farms and offer local workers a fairer shake.

Malik says such goodwill work has been very rewarding, especially having now seen how much Beijingers enjoy the organic products borne from it. And while organic coffee and honey have arguably been their signature products, Malik is also very open to growing more fiery wares (making her a suitable

profile subject for this spice-themed issue). As she puts it: "I have been opened up to a whole new cuisine and palette of spice and spices," during her time in China, adding, "I have also developed a taste for super



SAHRA MALIK (FIRST ON THE RIGHT) AT SHANGRI-LA'S BEE FARM

spicy – not quite a Sichuan level of spice, but I love *lajiao* and often add it to food. Our vision is to make Shangrila Farms a natural products brand and increase our portfolio, so we are also looking for interesting new items – and spices can definitely fit into that."

How to grow your own chili peppers at home

Shangrila Farms is also known for putting on indoor and urban gardening seminars. In keeping with our spicy theme, Sahra Malik has detailed instructions for growing your own chili peppers at home:

"Getting the tiny seeds to germinate can be challenging, but once they start sprouting, they are relatively easy to maintain. Select clean plastic pots or grow trays to start your pepper plants. Avoid pots containing peat because this can prevent the peppers from germinating. Keep your hot pepper plants in a warm, well-lit spot and you can look forward to plenty of red, green, or yellow-orange peppers."

1. Choose a smaller flower pot and fill it with soil.
2. Press one seed into each prepared pot, at least .5cm deep, into the center of the potting mixture. Cover the planted seeds with soil.
3. Place the pots in a warm, well-ventilated room.

4. Water the plants with warm water until water runs from the drainage holes in the bottom. Keep the pepper plants uniformly moist, but do not over-water them or the seeds might rot.

5. After the seedlings reach 10cm in length, water them with a 50-50 mixture of water and liquid fertilizer once a week (tip: coffee grinds make for a great fertilizer!).

6. Transplant the seedlings into larger pots when the plants look like they are outgrowing the pots.

8. Place the plants in a window where they can receive direct sunlight for 10 to 12 hours per day, or use grow lamps set 20cm away from the tops of the plants. The plants typically produce fruit in 90 to 110 days.

9. Harvest the peppers when the fruits are shiny and firm. Grasp each pepper near the stem and gently tug it loose. Most varieties of hot peppers will continue to produce fruit for several months.

SPICE, THE FINAL FRONTIER

By Andrew Killeen

Spice is the life of variety, as the saying goes. Sadly Rear View's *baijiu*-rotted intestines can no longer take spicy food, after an episode in which a particularly hot chili pepper caused serious hallucinations, and the eventual wreck of a ship carrying a consignment of hot pants – actually no, that was an episode of *The Simpsons*. In this Golden Age of television, it becomes ever harder to distinguish fiction from reality.

Still, an entirely imaginary Google search revealed that China will get its own version of '90s pop sensations the Spice Girls. We went to interview the group's sinister Svengali-like mogul, Sai Men Fu Le.

"The Zhong Lamei will definitely be better than the Spice Girls," Fu Le told us, or would have done if he existed, which he doesn't. "After all, what do the English know about spice? They think that using pepper as well as salt is adventurous eating. Also they claimed that Geri Halliwell was sexy, and Victoria Beckham was posh. So they're clearly all insane."

He had a point, we had to admit.

"And anyway, everyone knows pop music was invented in China," he went on. "In the Ming dynasty."

Ooookaaay ... How will the new Spice Girls differ from the usual C-Pop idols?

"In a groundbreaking move," he said, "they will be allowed to have distinct, if one-dimensional, personalities. Like the original Spice Girls, each member of the group will have a nickname, identifying them

as an archetype of contemporary Chinese girlhood. They're going to be called Cutie, Clingy, Bossy, Falsie, and Materialistic.

"Cutie Spice wears cat ears to class, Clingy sends you passive-aggressive WeChat messages if you don't call her on the hour every hour, Bossy makes you carry her handbag and won't let you drink beer, while Falsie spends all her time beautifying her selfies and saving up for plastic surgery."

"And Materialistic Spice?"

"She's going to sing the lead on our updated version of the Spice Girls' debut, 'Wannabe'. We've changed the lyrics to reflect 21st century Beijing:

If you wanna be my lover, you gotta have a car, an apartment downtown, and a big fat hongbao for my parents ...

"It doesn't quite scan," he admitted, "but it's bound to be a massive hit, as soon as we've worked out how to translate 'Zig-a-zig-ah!' into Mandarin."

But aren't these sort of stereotypes dated and sexist, we asked? Can't Chinese girls also be Sporty, Scary, Sexy, or Posh? Or, for that matter, Woke, Adventurous, Creative, or just plain Weird?

Fu Le looked at us in puzzlement.

"Don't be ridiculous," he said. "How would they ever find boyfriends?"



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