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## **New restaurant specializes in spicy Sichuan cuisine**

Michael Hastings

Sep 6, 2019

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Dry Pot Pork at New Sichuan at 2125 Silas Creek Parkway

Allison Lee Isley/Journal

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Michael Hastings

Winston-Salem's newest Chinese restaurant specializes in the chef's native Sichuan cuisine.

**W**New Sichuan Restaurant opened Sept. 3 at 2125 Silas Creek Parkway in a former Biscuitville building.

Owners Bao Lin and his wife, Min Zhu, recently relocated to Winston-Salem after running Happy China Sichuan Cuisine in Durham for about eight years.

“Happy China was a really big restaurant; we wanted something smaller,” Zhu said. “My husband said Happy China was too big a restaurant to run well.”

The couple sold Happy China last year. They looked to Winston-Salem as a good market for their kind of food. “We think Winston-Salem and Durham are similar cities, with similar populations,” Zhu said. “And we didn't see anyone doing Sichuan like we do.”

She said that Lucas Chang, the owner of Szechuan Palace on Healy Drive, used to be their landlord in Durham. But despite his restaurant's name, he's not serving the same kind of food that's her husband's specialty.

Sichuan (or Szechuan) cuisine is notable mainly for its spiciness. Sichuan peppercorns and dried chiles feature prominently. “The first time someone has the peppercorns, they think they're a little bitter, and then they feel a kind of numbing,” Zhu said with a laugh.

Just as almost every Chinese restaurant offers at least a few Sichuan dishes, New Sichuan offers all the popular dishes from other parts of China. Soups include egg drop, wonton and hot and sour (\$2.95 a bowl) — as well as large bowls of tomato egg, cabbage tofu and egg or shredded pork with preserved pickles (\$8 to \$9).

There's Hunan chicken (\$9.95) and Mongolian beef (\$10.95). Other standards include mu shu pork (\$10.95), cashew chicken (\$9.95), lo mein (\$6.95), fried rice (\$6.96), and shrimp with broccoli (\$12.95).

“Dan Dan with noodles is probably my favorite noodle dish,” Zhu said. The mildly spicy dish features ground pork and bok choy with thin Sichuan noodles that are similar to but a bit thicker than angel hair pasta.

Other noodle dishes include Sichuan spicy jelly noodle (\$10) and clear rice noodles with spicy meat sauce (\$9.95).

Most fans of Chinese restaurants in the United States know about hot pots. New Sichuan has a handful of dishes called dry pots. These are meat and vegetables cooked with the same spices and seasonings as a hot pot but with no broth — and it arrives at the table cooked and ready to heat, served in a bowl over a lit burner. The dry pot pork (\$16.95) comes with pieces of spicy stir-fried pork, zucchini and Chinese celery.

A vegetarian section of the menu has 13 dishes, including kung pao tofu (\$8.95) and eggplant in garlic sauce (\$8.95).

But what may set the restaurant apart in Winston-Salem is a designated Sichuan section of the menu with about 30 dishes from Lin’s native region. Appetizers include Sichuan wontons with red oil (\$5.95). Sichuan entrees include ma po tofu (\$11.95), which is fairly mild. It has large chunks of silky, soft tofu in a flavorful brown sauce with ground pork.

The spicy tri-pepper chicken (\$13.95) includes green bell pepper, dried red chiles and Sichuan peppercorns.

Several of the Sichuan specialties feature lamb — not common to many Chinese-American menus. These include scallion lamb, lamb with Sichuan sauce, cumin lamb and lamb noodle casserole (\$16.95 to \$19.95).

The menu also includes such cuts as tripe, ox tongue and pork intestine.

On the extra-spicy end of the spectrum is fish in Sichuan style sauce (\$15.95), which consists of a large bowl of flounder, cabbage and bean sprouts in a broth swarming with red chile peppers.

The menu ranks spicy dishes with one to three chile peppers. The fish in Sichuan is one of many dishes that rate three chiles. Zhu said that some customers are surprised by how hot some dishes are. “When they order something like the fish, I ask them if they’ve every tried it before, so I make sure they know how hot it is.”

The restaurant also offers a lunch special of soup or egg roll, rice and entrée for \$6.95 or \$7.95 with a soft drink. Lunch entrée choices include sesame chicken, General Tso’s chicken, beef with broccoli, curry shrimp and homestyle bean curd.

Zhu said they are happy to be in Winston-Salem, and to have a restaurant that they can easily manage themselves. Happy China in Durham has 150 seats. At New Sichuan, they have about 50 seats. “We wanted something smaller,” Zhu said. “My husband wants to make sure every dish is right.”

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## New Sichuan Restaurant

**Address:** 2125 Silas Creek Parkway, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27103

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**Hours:** 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and noon to 9:30 p.m. Sunday.

**Website:** <https://newsichuannc.com>

**Michael Hastings**