

Ping's Chinatown Chow

For months now I've anticipated Ping. The new restaurant, which opened in mid-February, is by Andy Ricker, who first introduced Portland to the authentic street foods of Thailand and Southeast Asia at his much-loved Pok Pok. He spent years traveling through Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia, and continues his survey of the region at Ping with "Asian pub food." The restaurant boasts floor to ceiling windows, revealing vibrant Asian pop art-lined tables and white paper scrolls hanging from the ceiling over the open kitchen. Pots, pans, and plates are stacked for display. Ping is located in Portland's dilapidated Chinatown. The question is: Can a gleaming trendsetter from an American restaurateur revitalize the neighborhood into the culinary destination place that it should be?

Start with a drink. Whether it's an Asian-inspired libation from the cocktail list or a sweet and tart fruit vinegar mixed with soda water, beverages are a must. This is a pub after all. Then on to the food, which at Ping is means a shared meal with taste sensations meant to enliven the senses—sweet, salty, sour, bitter, and savory—sometimes in a single dish. Take the Phet Pha Low, a Thai-style stewed duck leg served in a reservoir of spiced, aromatic pot liquor with pickled mustard greens, shitake mushrooms, and an egg that has been steeped in a potion of black tea. Eggs are all over the menu, from the delectable quail eggs wrapped in bacon and slathered in spicy mayonnaise to the salted duck egg salad. A meal here is bound to include an egg or two, whether it is grilled, salted, steamed, fried, or boiled.

The word "ping" is Thai for "grill," so logically the "grilled" category makes up about half of the menu. This is where I discovered new cuts of meat that I have never even heard of. Is there really such a thing as "pork collar," and who knew chickens had succulent "butts?" According to Ping they do, and they're served marinated or brined, skewered and char-grilled, accompanied by fresh, tangy sauces for dipping.

The food is complex and fascinating. For instance, Laksa is a steaming bowl of noodles with tofu, chicken, prawns, cockles, boiled eggs, and bean sprouts mingling in a vibrant curry broth. Even the no-frills Macanese-style pork chop, seared in pork fat and sandwiched between a grease-glistening bun with no garnishes or sauce, is sublime. From simple to convoluted, it's all satiating and down right cravable.

After two visits to Ping, I can confidently say that it is exactly what Portland's Chinatown needs to launch it's revitalization —turning it into a flavor mecca for adventurous eats and drinks.

Ping
102 NW 4th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97209

www.pingpdx.com
503.229.7464