

Restaurant Review: Tom's BaoBao

BY LING-MEI WONG



Pork and apple bao (Image courtesy of Tom's BaoBao.)



Curry beef bao. (Image courtesy of Tom's BaoBao.)

Tom's BaoBao opened its first international outpost in Harvard Square on July 12, bringing authentic steamed baozi or bao from Hangzhou. Owner Tom Tong's bao concept GanQiShi has more than 200 eateries in China, where nearly 250,000 bao are consumed in a day.

The menu features six bao, with a seasonal option. Traditional staples such as juicy pork (\$3.25) and vegetarian (\$3.50) are available, along with curry beef (\$3.75), lobster (market price), sweet potato (\$3), chicken (\$3.50), and seasonal pork and apple (\$4).

Handmade bao are showcased at the Boston location, with bao artisans or "baoists" producing 2,000 bao a day. Each apprenticed for at least three

months — many in China — to make bao that weigh precisely 100 to 102 grams each and have 16 to 22 hand-pinched folds to seal in the stuffing. None of the ingredients are frozen, with the bao made from scratch daily.

Each bao is pillowy, thanks to whole-wheat flour with less gluten shipped from China. The filling packs flavor from high-quality ingredients, without overdoing the seasoning. A perfect example is the lobster bao: the rich lobster flavor shines through, enhanced with sweet corn, butter and scallions.

Another favorite was the chicken bao. The chicken and carrots had deep flavor, accented with a sweet smoky sauce.

Juicy pork was deceptively simple but sublime. The filling's pork, ginger,

scallions and Shaoxing wine came together as an unctuous whole, soaking the bao in aromatic juices.

The pork and apple bao featured naturally sweet ingredients, tempered with soy sauce in the pork's braising liquid. It was a familiar flavor, with the apple melting into rich fatty pork.

Curry beef wraps beef, carrots and potatoes in mild curry, a bold complement to the tender bao.

The vegetarian options are hearty. Our sweet potato bao had large chunks of orange zest, adding texture without being too sugary. The vegetarian bao features bok choy, shiitake mushrooms and smoked tofu from Cambridge's Chang Shing Tofu, which also provides the soy milk (\$2.50). Bok choy and

mushrooms for the vegetarian bao are cooked, chopped and drained for the filling.

Tom's BaoBao elevates street food with wholesome ingredients and exacting preparation.

This was an arranged tasting, so Sampan's experiences may be more pleasant than the norm.

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