

The Brick Room

The Grand Hyatt Beijing's private dining room serves up classic Chinese cuisine in a sophisticated East-West setting.

By Rebecca Fannin

A SHORT WALK from the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square stands the towering, crescent-shaped Grand Hyatt Beijing, a bustling portal to a modern China that neither ancient emperors nor fin de siècle protestors could have imagined. Inside the vast, contemporary lobby, visitors are greeted by soaring ceilings, striking waterfalls and fountains and a plunging marble staircase, each carefully placed according to feng shui principles. But if the scope of the edifice seems a bit at odds with ancient values, enter the Brick Room, the hotel's private dining room, for a retreat into simplicity, discretion and scale.

Separated from its host restaurant, Made in China, by a brick divider, the Brick Room affords a glimpse of the action in the restaurant's theatrical showcase kitchen from a calm vantage point. While chefs work frantically at glass-encased stations, preparing sesame noodles, king prawn dumplings, wok-fried string beans, wood-fired poultry and mouth-watering desserts like mango-flavored fritters, guests in the Brick Room, which seats 10 to 12 people, are able to focus their attention on each other. The room's spare East-West decor is achieved with chairs covered in red velvet, a sleek modern glass table set with traditional Chinese ceramics, screens printed with Chinese motifs and contemporary lighting fixtures. The Brick Room can be reached either through the restaurant or, if privacy is desired, from a passageway off a quiet side entrance to the hotel.

Chef Kent Jin describes his food as fresh, authentic, down-to-earth Chinese classics with a surprisingly modern twist. Pan-fried duck liver comes with plum chutney in a sesame pancake, the traditional Chinese vegetable *tonghao* is spiced with garlic and Chinese rice vinegar, and creamy-tasting "jasmine tea-ramisu" is the chef's take on the Italian dessert, with a sprinkling of green tea powder on top, accompanied by sweet, olive-flavored ice cream.

Peking duck, a northern Chinese favorite, undergoes an unusual seven-step preparation that retains the duck's moisture while reducing fat content. It is then roasted in a wood-burning oven and carved at the table. Another



traditional favorite, beggar's chicken, takes its name from the street beggars who used to wrap chicken in clay, then roast it over an open flame. Jin's version features chicken stuffed with mustard greens and pork, wrapped in a lotus leaf and baked in a clay oven. Diners in the Brick Room can order from the Made in China menu or place special orders beforehand.

Westerners might want to join local Chinese diners in enjoying either Mao Tai, a grain-based distilled liquor, or Hua Diao, a rice-based wine, with their meal. The Westernized wine list features a \$50 bottle of Dragon Seal Huailai Reserve, a red wine from China's northeastern Hebei province. The list also features a 1998 California Cabernet Sauvignon, Geyser Peak Reserve, for \$120. On the high end, a 1990 vintage Bordeaux, Chateau Petrus Cru Exceptional Pomerol, is available for \$450 a bottle.

The Brick Room can be reserved for a minimum half day at \$500 plus a 15 percent service charge—one more sign of China's long march toward capitalism. **W**

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