

Way of the dragon

All-day yum cha by a renowned chef breathes life into Docklands

As a new restaurant precinct, Docklands has not set Melbourne on fire. Too many mediocre restaurants opening and closing in rapid succession, expensive parking and ubiquitous icy winds have made the place resistible. But some Docklands businesses are providing exceptions to the rule, offering hope that this precinct may yet live up to the initial hype.

A recent newcomer to the waterfront is Yum Cha Dragon. Part of a group of seven Docklands eateries owned by the Rivers Group (including Blue Fire, Steakhouse and Fish), Yum Cha Dragon comes with the added bonus of James Tan (The Duck, Magic City) in a head chef and consultant role. His influence is noticeable in the modern, user-friendly restaurant that combines nicely cooked and plated Chinese staples with a decent wine list, a smart room and obliging, friendly service.

The dining room is a simple, airy space that keeps overt oriental references to a clean-lined minimum – theme rather than theme

park. There are stone dragons at the front door, a dragon water feature at the back of the room, some coloured lanterns and shelves containing Chinese ceramics. Warm mustard and burgundy tones, a carpeted floor and comfortable black chairs make the room as cosy as it is smart, with distant water views providing an impressive backdrop.

The menu is cleverly constructed. Yum cha is available all day and while the list includes the usual dumplings and spring rolls, there are also pint-sized versions of many dishes from the a la carte menu so that you can create your own banquet. For those who like to share and sample many dishes it is ideal (there are multiple platter and banquet options, too) but there is also plenty for the “I want my own plate of food” demographic.

Tan’s clean, modern style worked well in such dishes as a sugar cured tuna (\$12.50/\$17.50), a sashimi-like dish served with a pretty beetroot shoot salad and the excellently crisp suckling pig (\$10.50/\$16)



TIM BARKER

that, with its tangy pineapple chutney, tasted like a spruced up sweet-and-sour pork.

Similarly good were the steamed oysters with salty black beans (\$4 each) and a Chinese-style coleslaw (\$10) with pickled vegetables. Such yum cha staples as pork buns (\$6) and prawn dumplings (\$7.50) proved to be decent versions of the classics.

Yum Cha Dragon adds another excuse to brave the Docklands. Its relaxed attitude and tasty fare could even have you adding it to your list of favourites.

COMPLEMENTED BY

The wine list – like the dining room – is simple and modern, featuring mostly well-

Yum Cha Dragon

G14, 427 Docklands Drive, Docklands, call 9329 6868

OWNER The Rivers Group

CHEF James Tan

OPEN Daily, 11.30am-10pm

Licensed. All cards and EFTPOS

COST About \$100 for two, plus drinks

known Australian labels that sit well with Chinese flavours. There is a fair selection by the glass. The 2006 Coldstream Hills chardonnay from the Yarra Valley (\$10.50/\$42) is an elegant, straightforward wine with hints of pear and spice and a nice dry finish. **ehw**