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## Noodle Factory provides sustenance in Montreal's Chinatown

### Noodling around

Joshua Karpati

*Chinatown's Noodle Factory may not break boundaries, but doesn't break the bank either*

You'd expect a place called Noodle Factory to be, well, big. Some kind of massive operation where a team of well-oiled (or floured) professionals would be hard at work creating a dizzying array of Chinese noodle products - thin, thick, rice flour, wheat flour, specialized soup noodles, the whole schmeer.

But you'd be wrong. Not in a bad way, mind you. It's just that Noodle Factory is a small place with a staff of about five, including the waiter. And the noodle-making porn goes on right before your eyes, if you're into that sort of thing. Located in Chinatown (all three blocks of it), it's a bright, welcoming place despite its bare-bones appearance. I always like it when a Chinese restaurant pays little heed to such things as doilies or tables manufactured after 1970. This says to me: "It's about the food."

Now, the thing with Noodle Factory is that while the food is good, it's no destination restaurant. I wouldn't cross town to pull up a chair, but I would definitely stop by if I were in the area (or nearby downtown) and didn't feel like eating at a large Chinese restaurant where I'd be forced into over-ordering, spending too much money, or hitting up a buffet featuring chafing dishes full of food also manufactured before 1970.

Noodle Factory is more like a Chinese version of a pho restaurant, a one-bowl joint that serves hearty, tasty and not particularly challenging food that still satisfies. It's actually the kind of ethnic down-home place we don't have enough of around town. Even though the focus is on one variety of thin, spaghetti-like flour noodle, it's turns out to be a good approach. Although the noodles could stand to be a little chewier, they're genuinely fresh and enjoyable. They also make their own dumpling wrappers, which are, I guess, noodle-adjacent.

A bowl of said noodles with coarsely ground pork and shredded cucumber in a thick black, hoisin-spiked sauce was warming, filling and subtle. Sure it was a little Boyardee-y, but it still had flavour. A bowl of soup (same noodles) with a delicate broth and a generous amount of fried smoked fish was actually quite interesting. Firstly, it's an unusual item to find on any menu in these parts, and secondly the fish was coated in a spice rub and deep-fried. It tasted exactly like sweet five-spice Vietnamese beef jerky. Nothing wrong with that.

Dumplings were, like the rest, non-descript yet good. Steamed pork dumplings stuffed with funky Chinese chives went well with a dipping sauce that didn't skimp on sesame oil. It did turn out that the seafood dumplings were virtually seafood-free and crammed with, uh, pork. Normally this would be a good thing, but here it was (literally) bait and switch. Our host graciously replaced our platter with vegetarian dumplings that were simply dumpling skins stuffed with the guts of a vegetable spring roll. Hey, it was better than a generic Buddha's Delight hotpot.

A selection of special dishes listed in Chinese above the open kitchen were mostly basic Chinese-restaurant standards. No tripe or braised pork belly or anything particularly interesting. But then, that's not the reason to go to a place like Noodle Factory. It fits snugly into its niche. Like most of the small ethnic eateries in Montreal, this one would be considered merely average at best in other major cities. But it's still great that they're around.

#### Noodle Factory

1018 St-Urbain; 514-868-9738

Dinner for two, including tax but before tip: \$15-\$25

Questions? Comments? Bitter rants? [jkarpati@hour.ca](mailto:jkarpati@hour.ca)

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Oodles of handmade noodles at the Noodle Factory

photo: Marianne McEwen

