

**DINING OUT**

BY ANNE DESBRISAY

The only heartache at Mekong? Whether to try all those dishes never tried before, or return to the tried and true

## *'I like Mekong more every time I visit'*

**MEKONG**

637 Somerset St. W.,  
613-237-7717

[www.mekong.ca](http://www.mekong.ca)

Access: Steps into restaurant

Price: Starters, \$4 to \$8;  
main dishes, \$9 to \$24

Open: Daily

This is not your rock-bottom-priced, cash-only, hole-in-the-wall Chinese restaurant. Mekong is a spruced up, white-clothed, raspberry-walled, mostly-Occidental-cliented Chinese restaurant with matching chairs, a steady kitchen and a service staff that goes the distance.

I like Mekong more every time I visit. It's always been a cut above and owners Dennis and Ruby Luc have always been gracious hosts. But the service seems more loving than ever and the food just keeps improving: specials more interesting, flavours more pronounced, raw materials more big ticket.

My only heartache at Mekong is whether I try all those dishes I've never tried before, or return to the ones I love: supple pot stickers, delicate shrimp dumplings, Szechwan style crispy beef, eggplant stuffed with pork in black bean sauce, five spice squid, Chinese broccoli with roasted garlic.

We are greeted warmly. How lovely to see us. Our table is ready. We follow our host upstairs to the cosy garret room created a few years ago. The little outdoor terrace is already filled. We sit on the long upholstered bench that rims the room, under loft beams painted yellow. And then we over-order.

Soft rice paper rolls, crisp rice paper rolls, Hunan dumplings, delicate shrimp dumplings, and pork siu mai, steamed wontons filled with pork and prawns. Skewers of beef are fragrant and moist, served with a well-bal-



PHOTOS BY ROD MACIVOR, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Duck is front and centre at Mekong, which serves Cantonese, Szechwan, Vietnamese and Thai foods.



anced peanut sauce.

Duck is on special. Crispy-skinned and juicy-fleshed, thick slices of the supple bird are piled on Chinese greens, topped with fragrant mushrooms and crispy-fried taro. Lobster is also featured. The sweet meat is

spilling out its shell, perfectly cooked and fresh tasting, slathered with ginger and scallions. The classic Szechuan crispy beef is all a good crispy beef should be, which is to say, crisp without being overly chewy and spicy without being incendiary.

Some of the seafood suffers from over exposure — the Thai seafood soup holds mussels that are withered in their shells and the big fat shrimp are tough — but then again, we find squid tender and yielding in its five spice powdered sauce, and a platter of tilapia moist-fleshed, bolstered with a black bean sauce and bright green broccoli.

We take lunch downstairs in that cotton candy pink room with black trim and white linen. It starts with a decent hot and sour soup and then a Vietnamese-style noodle dish of tender pork sprinkled with peanuts, served over greens and vermicelli with a sweet, sour and spicy broth redolent of lemongrass. It makes a fine lunch.

Mekong has more of a wine list than most Chinese restaurants, with many choices by the glass. There is also beer on tap and sake.