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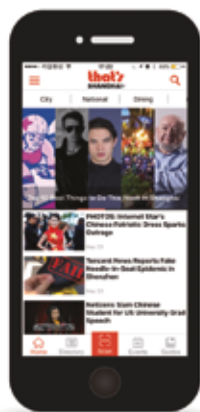
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DOMINIC DESMARAIS

King of the Suzhou Foodies

Interview by Ned Kelly

Born and raised in Montreal, Dominic Desmarais met a wonderful young lady from Suzhou in late 2010. She convinced him to sell everything, move East and pursue the Chinese Dream. They have lived in the city since 2014, now have a young daughter and love it. Dom is also the man behind the wildly popular WeChat groups Suzhou Foodies. We decided it was time to chow down with him.



How did Suzhou Foodies come about?

I created many WeChat groups before Suzhou Foodies. My friend Charles and I are big eaters, and one night – after binging on a lot of food and drinks – he asked me why I never created a WeChat group about food. So we immediately created one where people talk about and post pictures of food.

Were you surprised by its popularity?

Absolutely. Suzhou Foodies quickly filled up and became one of the most active groups on my WeChat. Every day, there are hundreds of messages and dozens of food pictures. I thought it would die down after a while, but it never did. I have recently had to create Suzhou Foodies #2 just to keep up with all the requests.

How would you describe the food scene in Suzhou?

When I moved to Suzhou in 2014, it was seriously depressing, but it has changed a lot since then. There are a lot of new restaurants opening up in Suzhou these days, such as a Greek restaurant (Golden Olives), Turkish

restaurant (Pistachio) and Spanish restaurant (Toro Loco). Now, if we could only get a good Canadian steakhouse with lobster poutine on the menu, I would be in heaven.

You have a guest in town for the weekend. What restaurants and bars would you take them to?

I would probably take them to Hong Deng Ji or Song He Lou so they can get a taste of traditional Suzhou food and culture. If they are craving Western food, I would take them to either T Boat or Golden Olives. For Sunday brunch, I would probably take them to the Kitchen Table at the W or Namaste in Ligondi. Bar-wise... Hemingway if they are looking for a trendy place, or Pulp Fiction if they are looking for the ultimate dive bar experience.

What is your favorite hidden gem in Suzhou?

I recently stumbled upon a little Italian restaurant in the old city called Sera Nera. It is located in a small alley called Wu Ya Chang, which is parallel to Shi Quan Jie. It is owned and operated by a local resident named

Blaze. The food is good and the homey atmosphere reminds me of the trattorias I used to visit in Italy.

If you could add one cuisine or concept that is missing from Suzhou, what would it be?

We need a Lebanese restaurant! I miss the delicious pickles, unique salads, Arabic bread, vegetable dishes and dips.

A typhoon is about to level Suzhou and you can save only one restaurant, which would it be?

Rong Vietnamese Restaurant. The food is fantastic and Larry, the owner, is a very genuine guy from Toronto. I could eat at Rong four times a week and still not get tired of it.

Add Dominic on WeChat (ID: D-o-m-i-n-i-c) to join his WeChat groups.





OLLIE'S

This Suzhou Staple Makes a Comeback

By Tess Humphrys

THE PLACE

For years, Ollie's had been a key fixture of the nightlife scene at the Ligondi 1912 Bar Street. But times have changed and so has Ollie's. Recently, they moved to a new spot in the Rainbow Walk complex by Jinji Lake.

THE FOOD & DRINKS

With an almost identical menu to their previous location, we started with some drinks, including a raspberry mojito (RMB68) that had very little booze and just a subtle hint of the fruit. Instead, an overwhelming amount of mint took over and obscured the other ingredients.

For food, the onion rings (RMB35) were light and crunchy, complemented by herb flavors in the batter. The pretty little salad (RMB45) was fresh and colorful, served with a pleasant, but slightly too peppery, vinaigrette.

The classic pizza (RMB98) had a thin crust that could have been crispier, but thanks to the toppings, the overall flavors were nicely balanced. It's certainly not the best pizza in town, but definitely worth ordering. The blue cheese burger (RMB88) was overwhelmed by a pile of (not very) caramelized onions and pepper flavor, while the beef patty itself was

thick and juicy. Overall, we felt that prices weren't cheap given the quality of the food.

THE VIBE

The setup and vibe of the place is very similar to the previous incarnation, with plenty of TV screens for sports, a pool table, and a stage for live music. If you liked Ollie's before, you'll definitely still be going, but will it win over new fans? We're not sure.

Rainbow Walk, 158 Xinggang Jie 星港街158号湖滨新天地. (137 7533 3522)





YONG FENG MARKET

Taiwan's Greatest Hits

By Dominic Ngai

THE PLACE

Step into Yong Feng Market at the basement level of Eslite Spectrum and it will immediately feel like you're at one of the main dining halls of Taipei's Shilin Night Market. Communal tables in the middle of the bustling restaurant are filled with large groups of diners conducting a symphony of noodle slurping and jovial chatter, while the smells of classic Taiwan-style dishes permeate the air. On the edges of the noodle stations are bar-style seats for smaller groups or solo diners, where you can watch the cooks prepare the food while you wait for yours.

THE FOOD

Yong Feng Market's menu features a compilation of the greatest hits in Taiwanese cuisine. From traditional street food to homey stir-

fried dishes and soups, the restaurant covers all bases at a friendly price. A plate of pickled cherry tomatoes (腌梅小番茄, RMB20) is the perfect cold appetizer for a hot summer day. Here, the peeled red fruits sit in a refreshing marinade with the flavors of preserved plum and citrus rinds.

Meanwhile, they also deliver a decent version of the traditional salt and pepper popcorn chicken (盐酥鸡, RMB18). Topped with fried Thai basil, the dish would've been perfect if it had just a tad more seasoning. Tainan-style *danzaimian* (担仔面, RMB18) has always been one of our favorite Taiwanese dishes, and Yong Feng Market's rendition features generous amounts of minced pork, squid ball, soy-marinated egg, bean sprouts and leeks.

Luroufan (卤肉饭, RMB12), the ultimate Taiwanese comfort food dish, is perhaps our favorite dish at Yong Feng Market. Topped with thick shreds of fatty pork belly and a delicious sauce, it resembles something that a Taiwanese mother would make for her family.

THE VIBE

Even on a Monday, Yong Feng Market was packed with hungry diners at lunch hour. They've got a WeChat ordering and payment system set up (Chinese only), and with plenty of staff on hand, the food came out of the kitchen in a very efficient manner.

B1/F, Eslite Spectrum, 8 Yuelang Jie, SIP 苏州工业园区月廊街8号诚品生活B1层 (512 6932 1385)

EVENTS



● **Parallelisms: Lu Junzhou**

This solo exhibition for calligrapher Lu Junzhou combines his longstanding love for the craft and places an emphasis on the release of emotion, rhythm and the expression of individuality.

// Through Sunday, Oct 21. Suzhou Museum, 204 Dongbei Jie 东北街204号 (szmuseum.com)



● **Vienna Boys Choir Concert**

First established in 1498, generations of the world renowned Vienna Boys Choir have been performing the masterpieces of some of Austria's best musicians like Mozart, Haydn and Schubert all around the world. Consisting of young boys between the ages of 9 and 14, they'll use their beautiful voices to serenade fans in Suzhou this month.

// Sunday, Sep 23, 7.30pm. RMB100-680. Suzhou Culture & Arts Center, 1 Guanfeng Jie, SIP 苏州工业园区观枫街1号 (www.sscac.com.cn)



● **Camel Pub Quiz**

Every Tuesday, the Hardest Working Man in Show Quiz-ness, challenges with 10 rounds testing a wide variety of subjects ranging from general knowledge, film and current affairs questions. A total of RMB800 in Camel vouchers are up for grabs, plus plenty of shots to keep the atmosphere lively and competitive.

// Every Tuesday, 8pm, free entry. The Camel, B1, Hengyu Plaza, 188 Xinghai Lu 苏州园区星海街188号恒宇广场一期地下一楼



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● InterNations September Event

Join InterNations' longstanding monthly networking event at Wu Manor, and meet fellow expats in the city over a few glasses of their house-made wine 'Sagrada Madera' and gorgeous views of the city's famous water canals near Shantang Jie. There's even an afterparty at Hemingway for those who want to party all night long.

// Friday, Sep 21, 7.30pm. RMB160 for albatross members / RMB210 for basic members / RMB230 at the door. 2 Beihao Nong, Gusu District 北浩弄2号吴宅庄园 (www.internations.org)



● Zhong Jinde's Wood Carving Art Exhibition

Born in the old town of Guangfu in Suzhou, Zhong Jinde follows the path of many famous wood-carving artisans from the area that came before him and has been honing his craft for more than 40 years. This exhibition features works that showcases his wide range of techniques, including the pieces 'Ode to Tea' and 'Holiness,' which will be donated to the Suzhou Museum as part of its collection.

// Through Wednesday, Oct 10. Suzhou Museum, 204 Dongbei Jie 东北街204号 (szmuseum.com)



● Ballet Flamenco Jesus Carmona: Impetus

Praised by The New York Times as "a representative of a new wave in Spanish dance," the multi-award winning dancer's acclaimed third production has been seen by audiences around Europe and North America. As the only stop in mainland China for the Asia leg of the tour, this is a great opportunity to see the show.

// Friday, Sep 21, 7.30pm. RMB100-880. Suzhou Culture & Arts Center, 1 Guanfeng Jie, SIP 苏州工业园区观枫街1号 (www.sscac.com.cn)

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