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## TWO CONTINENTS



The Gin N' Tonic is infused with sweet Thai basil, calamansi orange and nicely bittersweet Fevertree tonic water.

## Fat Rice blends Portuguese, Macau flavors into delicious mix

n a dark corner in a scrap- hipster bar. py part of town, located across from a gas station and an old Mexican supermarket, a bright light shines. This bit of illumination is Fat Rice, a new noodle, dumpling and rice shack from the proprietors of the former underground dining collective X-Marx that mingles the flavors of Macau and Portugal.

Until now, neither cuisine has been represented very well in Chicago. And with seemingly either a neo-retro-gourmet diner or a modern-rustic Italian restaurant opening every five minutes, such originality alone is a beacon of hope for Chicago's continuing culinary evolution.

Like the culinary focus, the aesthetic at Fat Rice, run by Adrienne Lo and Abraham Conlon, is also fairly unique. It's a sort of Chinese grandma's kitchen meets Logan Square

My admiration for Fat Rice doesn't come so much from its uniqueness or its off-the-beatenpath vibe, but rather from its fearless pursuit of rustic pre-

sentations and

authentic (by

which I mean

unfamiliar to

Westerners)

In some ways,

Fat Rice, which

ingredients.

**Chef Abraham** 

tongue, sour cabbage and wintermelon, is as hardcore as anything you'd find deep in

The appetizer bite of piggy tongue is Sichuanese, but there is very little salt or spice here. The hot fermented cabbage appetizer compensates for the lackluster tongue with fizzy fla-

vor and a snappy crisp texture. While the fleshy wintermelon is unfamiliar, it floats in a deeply comforting broth reminiscent of a schmaltz-bombed chicken soup topped with thick planks of smoky bacon and crusty hand-

ripped buttery croutons. Not everything at Fat Rice is unfamiliar. Those who've had a "garbage" salad at the local steakhouses would be somewhat familiar with Fat Rice's salada

gordo — a mound of charred padron peppers, chunky hardboiled egg, onion, candied nuts and rosy strips of salty-rich Jamon Iberico. Where a garbage salad is usually smothered with a flavor-killing ranch or blue cheese, the salada gordo is lightly dressed with a slightly sticky mango chutney port vinaigrette

that has a nice acidity. Perhaps the most familiar thing on the menu, a batch of

shrimp and pork-stuffed pot stickers, is the most unrecognizable. Most of us have suffered far too many over-steamed dumplings wrinkled within an inch of their lives and stuffed with tasteless gummy shrimp. The ones at Fat Rice are upended from their cooking pan and flipped upside down on the plate. They possess a dual crunch, one from the rich caramelized dumpling crust

and another from a lacy tiara of the dehydrated and dried salted seasoning liquid used to unstick the dumplings from the pan. The wrappers are delicate and the shrimp inside is moist, but not chewy. The black vinegar dipping sauce, mixed with a chili spice and scallion served on the

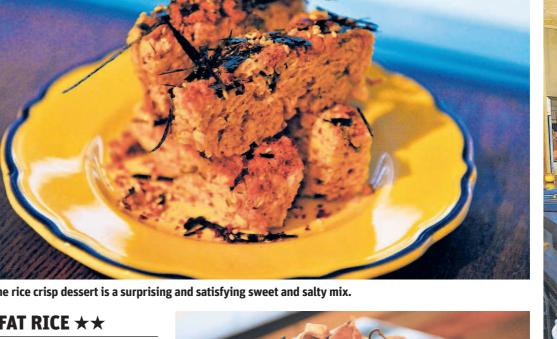
The potstickers at Fat Rice

**PHOTOS** 

restaurant are unique in style and texture and full of flavor.

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side, is a nice tangy foil. My table is mostly serviced by ninja-like food runners who drop plates and run without a word.



2957 W. Diversey, (773) 661-9170; eatfatrice.com

Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 6-10 p.m.:

Prices: Pickles and snacks: \$4; appetizers: \$5-\$14; wok and casserole (Clay Pot) items: \$8-\$34; dessert: \$6-\$8

Try: Potstickers, cauliflower claypot, and rice crisp

In a bite: A Portuguese/Macanese fusion spot serving comforting spicy authentic noodles, dumplings and rice

**KEY:** ★★★★ Extraordinary: ★★★ Excellent;

★★ Very Good; ★ Good; Zero stars: Poor

When we can get a hold of him, our server is enthusiastic and full of recommendations, though many of them are misguided. He claims one of his favorite cocktails (from the limited and focused drink menu) is the Callan Club, a mix of rum, tamarind vinegar, vanilla and star anise. It ends up tasting mostly like unmixed club soda. The real star quaff is the Gin N' Tonic, infused with sweet Thai basil, calamansi orange and nicely bittersweet

Fevertree tonic water. Our server also claims the African Chicken is the way to



The salada gordo is lightly dressed with slightly sticky mango chutney port vinaigrette.



Fat Rice's cauliflower clay pot is a vegetarian dream stew that can also satisfy a carnivore.

go, but the night he recommends it, the meat, while flavored with a nice smoke, is also dry and dusty. To his credit, on a second visit. I order it again and the

meat was succulent. Though he does not recommend it, I know I must have the house-special fat rice, a bowl brimming with a crunchy and



filled with pumpkin, al dente

dessert, a rice crisp encrusted

with fragrant coconut rice.

pretty happy too.

Lo's original venture, X-Marx, flower, a sweet-spiced curry also hunkered down in the dark and bathed mostly by glinting long beans and juicy okra served candlelight while finishing up

dream stew, the rich and starchy little secret. vegetables make this carnivore Michael Nagrant is a local freelance writer. E-mail the Sun-Times Dining section at diningout@ One recommendation from our server that's spot-on is the

the last of the rice crisp, it does Though it's clearly a vegetarian feel like I've discovered a great

> suntimes.com with questions and comments.

