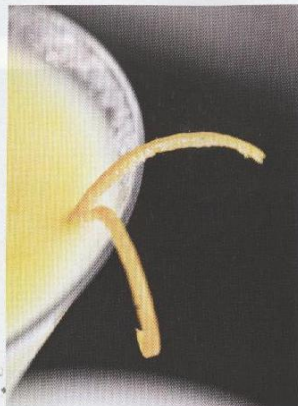




FOOD DRINK | REVIEW



Chow Wars

Expanding his Chinese restaurant empire, Michael Chow conquers Miami and bests the competition with the newest outpost of his celebrity playground | *By Jen Karetnick | Photography by Simon Hare*

Mr. Chow is perhaps one of the most famous brands to open on South Beach since Madonna. Despite the older celebrities (Jack Nicholson, Barbra Streisand) said to frequent the two New York City locations, it is clearly designed for the young and hip. The target generation is made pretty clear, first by the models gracing the host stand, so tall, thin and hot that they are the human equivalents of towering infernos, scorching the heads of the less-blessed of us as we are led to our tables (though frequent-dining patrons Michael Jordan and his fellow NBAers—past and present—still hover). Then it's hammered home by the menus, which are printed in a font size that only the optical equivalent of dog ears can see. Even reading glasses, and the illumination provided by a cleverly placed square of light in the center of the table, are Superman to this Kryptonite typeface.

It's a good thing, then, that the waitstaff is so well-versed in the dishes that they can guide you without either one of you having to refer to the list. That means any list, too—cocktail, wine, food—they seem to have it all memorized, or at least have the favorites down pat.

On one occasion, ordering the peachy vodka-Laurent Perrier Brut Champagne cocktail that bubbles under a strangely immovable foam that looks like it could join the cast of *Monsters & Aliens*, I barely had my mouth open to say "I'll have the 'Chow-'" before my server was nodding and chiming in with "Mini!" This can make dinner feel scripted and the waiters pushy, but they're so receptive that the slightest glare makes them back off speedily. (Unless you're one of those nicey-nice tourists from the Midwest. No offense, but you guys don't know how to glare.)

That said, don't be forced into what's called the Mr. Chow "semi-prix fixe" meal, a "balanced and harmonious dinner from the sky, land and sea." This translates to a rather boring two-course, family-style meal with a choice of whole fish, lobster or crab for your main course, plus sides of mixed veggies and fried rice. Though infinitely tasty, the servings are small, and as a whole it's designed for the unadventurous. The benefit is that if you're willing to spring for it, this is where you'll find the mahogany-skinned yet CONTINUED...

Mr. Chow

RATING: ★★★★★

W South Beach, 2201 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, 305.695.1695

Sun.-Wed., 6PM-11:30PM;

Thurs., 6PM-12:30AM;

Fri.-Sat., 6PM-1:30AM

What the stars mean

- ★ = fair, some noteworthy qualities;
- ★★ = good, above average;
- ★★★ = very good, well above norm;
- ★★★★ = excellent among the area's best;
- ★★★★★ = extraordinary in every detail.

Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambience and service.

HOW LONG IN ADVANCE SHOULD I MAKE A RESERVATION? A month, unless you like starting your meal at 6 or 11.

HOW DO I GET IN? Mr. Chow has a separate entrance from the W. Follow the dude exiting the Lamborghini.

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR? Anything that makes your chest or wallet look bigger.

IS THERE OUTDOOR SEATING? The patio dining area features seven white cabanas, seating parties ranging from four to twelve.

WHAT ARE THE CHANCES I'LL SEE A CELEBRITY? That depends on how you define celebrity, but keep your eyes peeled like lycebes, and you'll be rewarded with some nuts.

WHAT IS COSTS: Appetizers, \$9-19; main courses, \$19-45; prix-fixe, \$54-62 per person; desserts, \$10

CHOP CHOP! At top, clockwise from left: The dining room boasts fixtures hand-picked by Michael Chow. The chilled mango with tapiaoca cocktail. Almond al fresco. *Bolaw.* A lamb and spring onion dish.

