

## Dining out

# House of Hunan and Sayat Nova spawn a pair of new pleasers

By Johnrae Earl

Restaurant critic

**NEW RESTAURANTS.** They're everywhere. They're popping up so fast they keep a restaurant critic hopping like a jack rabbit.

Two we want to report on are almost as widely separated from a cuisine standpoint as they are geographically. Both are worth visiting. They are:

● Sayat Nova — Des Plaines, 20 W. Golf Road (at Mt. Prospect Road), Des Plaines.

● House of Hunan Michigan Avenue, 535 N. Michigan Av. (on the Magnificent Mile).

The new Sayat Nova takes its name from a wandering Armenian troubadour from the days of yore. It also is a branch of the charming Sayat Nova at 157 E. Ohio St.

An Armenian diet is everything a healthy person could ask for to remain healthy; it consists chiefly of vegetables, nuts, yogurt, cheese, cracked wheat, and meat.

The Sayat Nova — Des Plaines menu offers 13 appetizers and 10 entrees for dinner. Luncheon offerings are similar, but there aren't so many.

There are some dips to go with that fantastic Armenian bread. Hummos is a well-known dip prepared with ground chick peas blended with Persian lime juice, lemon juice, and olive oil.

Baba ghannouj is an Armenian baked eggplant appetizer that also goes well with the bread, as does jajic (yogurt, cucumber, and mint leaves).

A melt-in-your-mouth tidbit is boereg, a hot cheese pastry. There are two fatayers. One contains spinach and onion, and the second contains ground meat, pine nuts, and onion. Both are wrapped in flaky pastry.

When it comes to entrees, we highly recommend the sauteed lamb. It consists of bite-sized pieces of lamb sauteed with tomatoes, onion, and green pepper. Sayat Nova also serves mouth-watering lamb chops.

If you're a meatball freak, you will like the kofta. It's ground meat mixed with cracked wheat, nuts, and spices.

There are three kebabs: shish, lula, and chicken. The shishkebab gives you a choice of lamb or beef cubes broiled on skewers with green pepper and tomato and served with rice pilaf.

The lula is ground beef and lamb broiled on skewers and served with rice pilaf, broiled green pepper, and tomato.

Chicken kebab, perhaps, is the most unusual. It's a marinated breast, charcoal broiled with tomato and green pepper. It's also served with rice pilaf.

If you want steak, there are strip and filet mignon. Both come with rice pilaf, broiled green pepper, and tomato. And if you're undecided, there's a combination plate of Armenian specialties.

Dinners range from \$7 to \$8.90 and include choice of hummos or jajic and salad. Luncheons are \$2.50 to \$4.90. Call 296-1776 for reservations.

**HOUSE OF HUNAN** Michigan Avenue takes you through Mandarin, Hunan, Szechwan, Shanghai, and Cantonese cuisines. And all are done well.

All, we might add, except the mediocre spring rolls. They're advertised as Shanghai style with seafood stuffing. We tried them twice, and the only seafood we

## Recommended

**THESE RESTAURANTS** were reviewed in recent weeks and are recommended for your dining pleasure:

**LE RENDEZ-VOUS** — A chic new restaurant at 160 E. Ontario St., that serves the new "light sauce" French cuisine. Good veal kidneys in mustard sauce and superb veal medallions. Try the artichoke bottoms filled with beef marrow and truffle sauce. A five-course minimum a la carte dinner will cost \$18.15. Call 644-4240 for luncheon or dinner reservations.

**SHANGHAI LIL'S** — A fun place for the entire family at 5415 N. Milwaukee Av., Sunday matinee is especially popular with the kiddies. There's a Polynesian stage show every day and a buffet (\$5.25 for adults, \$3.75 for children) Sunday and Tuesday. Call SP 4-2600. Closed Mondays.

**SALVATORE'S** — A sparkling new restaurant at 525 W. Arlington Pl. Good northern Italian food. Good green noodles and veal dishes. Try salimbocca Florentine or fettuccine carbonara. Entrees, \$3.75 to \$10.95. Call 526-1200.

**OLD COURT HOUSE INN** — Enjoy a drive into the country and a good dinner in a 120-year-old jail cell on the Town Square in Woodstock. Good steaks and prime rib. Don't miss the bourbon pie. Dinners, \$4.75 to \$12. Call 815-338-6700 and reserve your cell.

**DRAGON CASTLE** — Try the ancient Szechwan Chinese Cuisine, which is new in the Chicago area, at 1423 Indianapolis Blvd., Whiting. Steaks of the Orient also provide a unique experience. Live entertainment. Entrees, \$4.50 to \$10.50. Family dinners, \$12-\$48. Call 219-659-7770.

could detect were fragments of shrimp.

Everything rolled along well from there, though. Shrimp toast was the best we ever have eaten, and the pot stickers were fantastic.

The sate beef, a Mandarin dish of marinated slices of barbecued beef on skewers, also was exceptional. There also are cold appetizers. Try the hot and sour cabbage, a Szechwan hot, hot salad, or the drunken chicken that is chilled in wine sauce.

The menu is carefully marked so that those with timid palates won't stumble on a too-spicy dish. However, the hot and sour soup, while delicious, was somewhat mild.

There are eight other soups. You will like the chicken sizzling rice, the shrimp sizzling rice, or the velvet corn soup with crabmeat.

The entrees are unusual. Willow beef, for instance, is a spicy-hot Hunan dish in which beef slices are sauteed in hot sauce. This is one of our favorites.

Another favorite is Hunan shrimp, whole shrimp in the shell sauteed with ginger in hot chili sauce; eat 'em with your fingers. Duck with pickled vegetables (Mandarin) is an experience. Szechwan beef, another "don't miss," is prepared with peanuts in hot pepper sauce.

One of our most delightful entrees was a whole fish steamed Mandarin style with ginger, black mushrooms, and Chinese ham. Don't waste the cheeks; they're good. There are also four kinds of duck: ginger, crispy, smoked, and Peking.

If you're searching for something new, turn to the noodle section of the seven-page menu. There you'll find Szechwan won ton; pork, chicken, shrimp, and beef fried noodles; and hot and sour noodles. All worth trying.

The menu is so extensive it's impossible to detail everything. Just head for 535 N. Michigan and enjoy. Dinner entrees range from \$5.25 to \$8.95. Call 329-9494 for reservations for luncheon or dinner.