



NEW LOCATION

New Nam Kee: not as cheap, slightly less cheerful, but just as appetising

★★★★★
Still famous

The most recent addition to Amsterdam's award-winning Nam Kee chain lacks some of the weathered charm of its older brother on the Zeedijk. At the new De Pijp location, opened in October, the no-frills surroundings are replaced with lush plants, ornate lacquered wood chairs and rows of ducks strung neatly by their necks near the kitchen.

The long, fluorescently lit room has the cold, tiled atmosphere of a conference hall – and on the night we visited a single large group dominated one whole side of the restaurant. Despite their raucous presence (by the end of the night they were actually catapult-

ing fortune cookies at one another's heads), service was swift and professional throughout.

The restaurant's menu still reads like a leather-bound encyclopedia of Cantonese cuisine and is a challenge to decipher due to some foggy translation and vague descriptions, such as 'boiled unpeeled prawns' and 'chicken with celery'. But all the classics are still here, including those oysters with black bean sauce (made famous by Dutch author Kees van Beijnum whose 2000 novel was named 'De Oesters van Nam Kee'). Lightly steamed so the plump oysters maintain a raw quality and topped with a spicy sauce of salted black beans and sliced spring onions, it's not exactly

a cheap eat (at €2.50 each), but was definitely worthy of its celebrity.

We followed with a heaped plate of fried noodles topped with that crisp Asian green *gai lan* and tender slices of garlicky beef; a generous and fluffy vegetarian omelette stuffed with peppers, shitake mushrooms and bean sprouts, and our favourite, a claypot with chicken on the bone with Chinese vegetables and crumbly bean curd that melted into the soy-based sauce. Despite swimming in a scolding pot that was still simmering when it arrived at the table, the chicken's skin maintained a crispy crunch, while the meat underneath was deliciously juicy. We struggled to finish any of the dishes between the three of us and

ended up taking away two containers full of food. Our server was more than happy to oblige and even came chasing after us with the bag when we almost left it behind.

Steamed so the plump shellfish maintains a raw quality

Even if the new location is lacking a little soul and prices have been jacked up a bit to suit the swankier decor, the newest Nam Kee still knows how to pump out generous plates of home-spun Chinese cooking. And we're sure, given time, it will develop some charm of its own.

Nam Kee Marie Heinekenplein (670 2336/namkee.net). Open daily 12.00-midnight. Main courses €8.50-€19. Credit MC, V. Leisha Jones.

NAM KEE DE PIJP

3 OYSTERS IN BLACK BEAN SAUCE	7.50
1 BEEF AND VEGETABLE NOODLES	11.00
1 VEGETARIAN OMELETTE	11.00
1 CHICKEN CLAYPOT WITH VEGETABLES	12.00
TOTAL	41.50

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