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QUICK TASTE

Baoism Shanghai, China Linehouse

Photography by Dirk Weiblen

This photogenic little hot bun shop in Shanghai is only 52sq m in size, but packs in a lot of design nonetheless. Aiming to capture some of the culinary buzz around updated – or upmarketed – street food, Baoism is a clever take on a very traditional, popular bite. The designers make an analogous transition, employing rough-and-ready materials such as steel, raw timber and bronze, but cooking them up into a fresh dish. The space is a simple box with decent ceiling heights, so the parti divides it into two halves, one for food preparation and the other for consumption. Upon an unpolished concrete floor, a pair of steel ‘cages’ articulate the two parts. This is accomplished with a framework of bronze-and-steel poles and horizontal rods that define the layout areas and give definition to the vertical planes. The frame supports a weave of perforated, rusting metal sheets that wind in and out between the poles. The allusion is to the woven steamer baskets in which the buns were traditionally prepared and served, and the idea is well conveyed. The woven panels make the visual connection but are also quite handsome in their own right; we know the ubiquitous material and are made to reconsider it aesthetically here.

The cages combine bronze and raw steel elements in a more subtle expression of the yin-yang relationship between basic and refined – which could be taken as a metaphor, twice removed, for the way the buns are offered here. Overhead, the rods crisscross below the ceiling and house bare fluorescent tube lighting. The detail of this is particularly well done: the tubes seem to emerge out of the steel rods – at about the same diameter – almost as an alchemistic transformation, as if ore had become charged to a glow.

The furnishings are appropriately simplified: narrow timber counters on steel frames and attractive custom-designed wood stools that reference the typical, tinier versions seen all over the city’s sidewalks, heralding quick grub.

Baoism appears to do very little at first glance, but actually incorporates a tightly cohesive design agenda and dashing detailing. Most patrons will wolf down their buns while staring into their phones, and miss the subtle pleasures Linehouse has provided. But a lucky few will pause long enough to notice there’s a lot more to making something delicious... and remember it’s a rare hand that can do it.



