

NYC Restaurant Group Sets Sights on Expansion

Tao has teamed up with Madison Square Garden Company to grow its dining-entertainment venues across the U.S. and abroad

By CHARLES PASSY – September 14, 2017



At the Tao Group’s restaurants, subtlety is so passé. The New York-based hospitality company embraces a more-is-more philosophy in its Manhattan dining and nightlife hot spots. Think the towering statue of a Buddhist goddess, replete with 24 arms, that dominates the 320-seat, Asian-themed Tao Downtown in Chelsea. Or the colorful street art, including an 11-foot statue of a purple-hued break-dancing bunny on display at Vandal, the 360-seat, street-food-inspired dining destination on the Lower East Side.

Tao Group executives say the party is just starting, pointing to new restaurants slated to open in New York and Chicago. As with all expansion plans, there are risks.

Meanwhile, some industry observers wonder if the food at Tao Group’s establishments, which frequently has been panned by restaurant critics, will ever rise to a level equal to the spaces’ buzz-generating look and vibe.

Then again, Arlene Spiegel, a New York-based restaurant consultant, posits that it may not be part of the plan. “Food is secondary with this group,” she says. “They’re in the business of selling fun and good times to their cult followers who always want to party.”

Tao Group’s establishments have been hammered by restaurant reviewers, who find the cuisine, despite its creative presentation, lacking in finesse. ●