

DIM SUM DISASTER

There's nothing better than a hot, steaming *char siu bao* to start the day. I've written about my love for them before, having consumed my fair share of these delectable barbecue pork buns while living in Singapore. It was common for me to pick one up with a cup of *kopi* on the way to the work, pretending that the extra few blocks of walking would counteract the high calorie intake.

But back home here in Brooklyn, they're not so readily available. Finding authentic *baos* requires a subway ride, getting hassled by suspect men trying to sell me counterfeit Gucci bags, and waiting behind a long line of 20-somethings in the heart of Chinatown. Don't get me wrong, they are worth the trouble, but I rarely have time for that kind of indulgence. So, I figured the next best thing would be to learn how to make them myself. How hard could it be?

I sifted through my extensive cookbook library and found a few books on Chinese cuisine that included some recipes for *dim sum* and *baos*. They were pretty straightforward with various recipes for the filling and a few for the dough. Unfortunately my pantry and fridge weren't fully stocked considering I had no oyster sauce, five spice or pork on hand. So I made a shopping list and downed a bagel with a schmear instead.

Eventually I got all of the ingredients together and started my prep. Everything came together perfectly. The *char siu* mixture was so close to what I remembered that it took everything in my power not to eat it before stuffing it into the dough.

The dough was resting by my windowsill, puffed up to nearly double its size after a couple of hours. It was finally time to assemble and steam the *bao*. I gingerly rolled out the dough, placed a spoonful of mixture smack in the center and

then attempted to twist the top of the *bao* closed, just as instructed. And that's when the trouble started.



They had no resemblance to the pictures, the pork mixture was oozing out of the seams, and once wet, the dough edges wouldn't stick together. Trying to salvage what I could, I did everything but staple them together. I placed them in the steaming basket and hoped for the best.

Thankfully, only my husband was here to witness the disaster. The buns had exploded, the mixture smeared all along the bottom of the basket, and the dough looked more like a chubby

taco than a bun. Although not very pleasing to the eye, they didn't taste too bad. The filling saved the day, even if the dough was a bit tough due to my overworking it.



Even after a few more tries, I've still never quite perfected them. I can at least get them to stay closed, but somehow my mixture to dough ratio isn't quite right. Maybe it's time to head back into the city in search of the perfect *bao*. After all, who couldn't use a new Gucci bag?

