

KOWLOON SHANGRI-LA'S MARGAUX AND ISLAND SHANGRI-LA'S RESTAURANT PETRUS: CROSS MARGAUX OFF YOUR LIST OF PLACES TO VISIT

Shangri-La Asia Ltd has a well-earned reputation for managing some of the best 5-star hotels in Asia.

However, what TARGET has recently discovered is that management of 2 of the Company's hotels, operating in the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), can vary quite markedly.

At least, without question, management of these 2 hotels varies very markedly in respect of the hotels' fine-dining outlets, which one would think should be the hotels' showcases.

If management of the 2 food outlets is to be considered a valid indicator of the 2 hotels' overall management styles, then, somebody may like to pull out all the stops to clean up the mess in one of the hotels.

The 2 fine-dining establishments are Restaurant Petrus, located on the 56th floor of Island Shangri-La, and Margaux Restaurant, located on the Mezzanine Floor of Kowloon Shangri-La.

Visiting the 2 restaurants and making note of their quality, leads one to the conclusion that Restaurant Petrus needs more publicity – because it is so good and it appears to be keeping this a bit of a secret – while Margaux should be closed down – because it is so bad and people have begun to realise this fact because few patrons, today, seem to want to frequent it.

TARGET visited Margaux on February 3 at 7:30 pm and Restaurant Petrus on February 16 at 12:30 pm.

This is what TARGET ordered from the respective restaurants:

Margaux Restaurant	Restaurant Petrus
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Appetiser</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Crab Meat and Scallop Salad, tossed in Passion Fruit Vinaigrette</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Appetisers</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">1. Stewed Snails with a Tomato Concasse, scented with light Spices and Parsley; and, 2. Duck and Gooseliver Terrine, candied Shallots with Blackcurrant</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Fish Course</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pan-fried Fillet of Turbot, with a Mediterranean Crust, young Spinach and Parslied Salsify</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Soup Course</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chicken Broth with Cep Mushrooms and Duck Liver</p>
	<u>Main Courses</u>

<p><u>Main Courses</u></p> <p>1. Golden Brown Veal Sweetbread and Mushroom Ragout, served with Snow Peas; and, 2. Braised Veal Shank with white Truffle Scent, accompanied with fresh Pasta and Vegetables</p>		<p>1. Stuffed Chicken Breast with Truffle and Leak Fondue; and, 2. Pan-fried Cod Fillet Ratatouille with Fennel Butter</p>
<p><u>Desert</u></p> <p>Pistachio Indian Ice-Cream, served with Kumquat Custard</p>		<p><u>Desert</u></p> <p>Strawberry Shortcake</p>
<p>\$HK845 plus 10 percent service charge</p>		<p>\$HK586 plus 10 percent service charge</p>

The prices of the 2 meals were not far off, everything considered, but the difference in the quality of the food and the presentation of the dishes was such that, in the case of Margaux Restaurant, this reviewer and his companion left the restaurant, leaving most of the food only lightly sampled, while, in the case of Restaurant Petrus, the food was consumed, almost entirely.

Also, it was clear that Restaurant Petrus employs a European chef, whereas, in the case of Margaux, there was no chef in attendance when TARGET dropped in.

And, according to some senior staff of Kowloon Shangri-La, there has not been a European chef, permanently in attendance at the outlet, for some time.

In a conversation with Mr Christopher Lee, Deputy Assistant Manager, Kowloon Shangri-La, on Sunday, February 20, TARGET was told: *'You are correct. There is no chef in Margaux, now.'*

TARGET did not need to be told of this fact, but it was nice to obtain confirmation from Management, nevertheless.

The Kowloon Shangri-La's Margaux

Over the years, Margaux, the fine-dining outlet of Kowloon Shangri-La, has had its ups and downs, but its downs were never to the extent that they are today.

Today, this restaurant must be setting a new record, eclipsing the former the nadir of this outlet.

The best of all the 4 dishes, which the menu described as being, *'Menu Gourmand'*, was the bread, all 7 different kinds that are placed on the table as a matter of form.

It appeared that the bread was freshly baked and was served warm.

With this kind of introduction to the restaurant, TARGET's reviewer anticipated that this must be an indication of a first-class food outlet.

How wrong can be first impressions!

The first course, the Crab Meat and Scallop Salad, comprised 6 (tinned or frozen) scallops and some crabmeat, probably, also, frozen.

There was absolutely nothing wrong with this little dish since the lettuce leaves, laced as they were with the Passion Fruit Vinaigrette, managed to dress up that which was lacking in regard to the insipid scallops and crab meat.

The insipidity of the scallops and crab meat was not the restaurant's fault since that is what happens when one uses frozen food: It loses a great deal of its flavour.

However, considering the cost of the dinner, which is expensive, even by HKSAR terms, it is a bit too much to be served junk when one is paying through the nose for the best.

The Pan-fried Turbot was good, and it appeared that the fish had not been frozen. But it, also, was evident that the dish lacked, of all things, salt.

At first, this was a bit of a mystery. The lack of seasoning had been noted on tasting the Crab Meat and Scallop Salad, but this matter had been discarded on the assumption that, perhaps, the cook had been schooled not to season dishes too well because some people prefer to season their own food.

But it was, now, very apparent that the person in the kitchen, preparing the food, was unlikely to be a European chef since it is well known that experienced European chefs have their own signature in respect of seasoning; and, they brook no argument on that score.

While the presentation of the Pan-fried Fillet of Turbot was excellent, that was where the excellence stopped.

It is probably incorrect to say that the fillet of turbot had been poached and then sautéed, but that seemed to be the case on close investigation of the fish meat.

Also, the speed with which it appeared on the table made one think that this dish had been pre-cooked.

One other point about this dish was that the fillet was lying on a bed of spinach, which had been cooked in the Chinese manner: Stir-fried in the wok, or some such pan, with a little oil popped in for good measure.

The 2 main courses, the Veal Sweetbreads and the Braised Veal Shank were, both, a joke.

One bite -- and that was enough.

There were 2 factors, consistent in both dishes: They both lacked any salt; and, they both were tasteless.

Both dishes were quite large, but how can one eat any large amount of dry, fried mush, supposedly comprising veal sweetbreads, or a chunk of stewed veal shank, so badly overcooked that the meat had fallen off the bone, having lost any flavour that once endowed it.

As for the fresh pasta: What utter rubbish! It was dehydrated pasta, which one can buy from any Wellcome Supermarket.

Come on, Mr Kowloon Shangri-La: Give me a break!

The Chinese captain, seeing that this reviewer and his companion were not eating any of the main courses, casually cleared the dishes with a pleasant, but perhaps sheepish, grin.

Did he know that the food description was fraudulent?

The dessert is hardly worth mentioning, so TARGET shall not waste time with it.

On leaving this 54-seater restaurant, this reviewer could not help but comment to himself: How the mighty have fallen!

TARGET is certain that nobody knew of our presence and, in any case, it would not have made any appreciable difference since the die, so to speak, had been cast long before TARGET's reviewer stepped into the hotel.

The Island Shangri-La

Mr Eric Desgouttes is still the Maitre d'Hotel of Restaurant Petrus, surprisingly lasting after more than 3 years of service in this fine outlet at Island Shangri-La.

The restaurant remains, just about, as it was when it first opened in 1991.

The service staff in this restaurant, though changed almost entirely from the old crew, is well trained, and is very attentive.

One cannot help but be impressed by the quality of the service staff.

TARGET's reviewer and one companion were not spotted for the first 30 minutes on entering the restaurant so that the service, prior to discovery, was on a par with that which was offered after Mr Desgouttes realised what was going on – that TARGET was reviewing the restaurant.

This is in stark contrast to Kowloon Shangri-La where the Chinese captain and all the other crew had no idea what TARGET was doing – and, probably, had no idea what they were doing, to boot.

The first courses of the luncheon, the Stewed Snails and the Duck and Gooseliver Terrine, were good, but the Stewed Snails, swimming in a Tomato Concasse, was about 10 miles in front of the Duck and Gooseliver Terrine (in TARGET's opinion, of course).

The great thing about the stewed snails, served in Restaurant Petrus, was that they were not oily, as escargots in their shells, invariably, will be because the flavoured butter, piled in after the snail meat is placed in vacant shells – the snails, having been pre-boiled – naturally makes the entire dish very rich and very oily.

The flavour of the Tomato Concasse sets off the stewed snail dish very pleasantly, it, having just a hint of sweetness to it.

As for the Duck and Gooseliver Terrine, in TARGET's opinion, it was far too heavy to be an appetiser.

There was nothing wrong with this dish, mind you, but one felt that one was eating a slice of meat, rather than a duck liver and goose liver terrine.

Also, one could taste the '*meat*', if that was what was used to hold the liver together, overpowering the flavours of the liver cubes.

The soup, on the other hand, being a fairly simple chicken broth with chunks of delicious cep (mushrooms), was wonderful and light, exactly what one would want from a consommé.

Making a consommé is not as easy as one would think since it takes a considerable length of time to produce a good consommé; and, the person, producing the soup, must know exactly which ingredients will produce the correct and best flavours.

Using woodland mushrooms is a sure winner when it comes to producing a good soup, especially one where the flavours of nature are supposed to permeate the palate.

What was missing from the soup, however, was the duck liver!

Somebody forget to include it in the soup.

It did not matter, actually, because the consommé was good enough without anything else added to it; and, that was the reason that this reviewer made no mention of the oversight to anybody.

The 2 main courses were just about equal in excellence (note that TARGET considered both main courses to be excellent).

The Stuffed Chicken Breast was superb, but some people may think it to be a little dry.

The chicken, itself, had been wrapped in bacon, during the baking process, and this tended to make the stuffing – TARGET has no idea as to what the stuffing comprised – in which pieces of ham had been blended in, a homogeneous unit with the chicken breast and part of the wing.

The taste was excellent and it was devoured in its entirety.

As for the Pan-fried Cod Fillet, it was on a par with the stuffed chicken, having been poached to perfection.

(Yes, poached, not pan-fried)

The menu stated that the fish would be pan-fried, but, in fact, it had been poached and then, perhaps, the fish meat had been lightly sautéed, just before being served.

Cooking fish, like producing a consommé, is not as easy as one may think because one can, very easily, overcook fish, thus ruining it, completely.

In the case of Restaurant Petrus, whoever is doing the cooking knows his/her onions (please forgive the improper use of this simile, chef).

The ratatouille, a vegetable stew, made from eggplant, tomatoes, zucchini, peppers and onions, were a nice and logical complement to the fish dish.

With the meal, one is served, a glass of Bordeaux Chateau Timberlay, Vintage 1996, or a glass of Chardonnay, Chevaliere Reserve, Vintage 1998.

These wines are hardly fine wines, but they are very, very drinkable.

As for the bread, served in Restaurant Petrus, sorry Monsieur Desgouttes, but Margaux serves better bread and a better selection.

The dessert, a type of strawberry shortcake, is not worth mentioning since it was nothing more than a soggy sponge cake which had assumed this posture due to the strawberry juices, having had invaded the cake.

The dessert, probably, was the weakest point of the meal (next time, this reviewer shall be ordering a soufflé or a crêpe)

Restaurant Petrus is not cheap, but you receive that for which one pays.

This is unlike Margaux in Kowloon Shangri-La, an outlet that should be shut down because it is, pretty much, a fraud as a fine-dining restaurant.

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