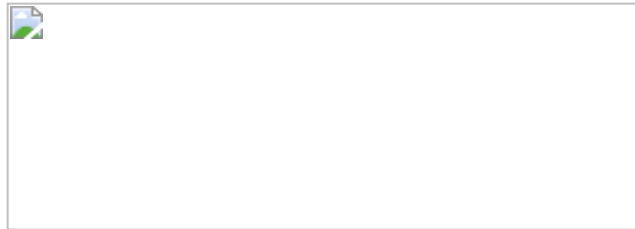


RESTAURANT

Among The Worst



OF



FROM HEAVENLY FOOD TO RUBBISH

The irate and, clearly, flustered Restaurant Chef Giovanni Greggio telephoned the offices of TARGET, recently, stating: *'I don-na use-a frozen-a lobste-er... only da fresh-a lobster-a ... You come-a see; I use-a only da fresh ...'*

This reviewer does not need to go to see the kitchen of Nicholini's, the once, proud premier restaurant of Conrad International Hongkong, because after so many years of eating, with a fairly hefty rotund belly as proof of the experience, this reviewer can easily tell the difference between a fresh lobster and one that has been frozen in order to facilitate it, being kept for a long period of time.

Mr Giovanni Greggio is, in TARGET's opinion, the rather tired Restaurant Chef of Nicholini's.

On the night of March 26, at about 8 pm, he was not in attendance.

The maitre d'hôtel, Mr Guiseppe Devito, was, also, not in attendance on that evening.

If Mr Giovanni Greggio and/or Mr Guiseppe Devito had been in attendance, on that night, then, TARGET suggests that either one, or both, of them were attending to their respective ablutions, defecating, or taking naps when our team rolled in to sample the food, after some years of absence.

Regardless, for one hour or so, they were not in attendance. Of that, there is no question.

Nicholini's was, in TARGET's previous estimate, one of the best food outlets in any hotel in the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

But that was in days of yore, sadly.

That was, also, before the PRC Government assumed sovereignty over these 416 square miles, and during the days when being the best meant something.

Today, Nicholini's is a far cry from its old self.

On the Monday evening that the TARGET team visited Nicholini's, TARGET ordered following without looking very carefully at the menu:

Waldorf Salad
Caesar Salad

John Dory, wrapped in Bacon
Lobster Lasagna

The Salads

The Caesar Salad was, as it should have been: A salad of a base of romaine lettuce, anchovies, croutons, and grated cheese, tossed in a dressing of olive oil, lemon juice, and the yolk of a fresh raw egg.

The salad was fine and deserved a score of 8 points out of 10 points.

Not much can go wrong with such a simple dish.

The Waldorf Salad, however, was another matter.

For the record, and for the benefit of the struggling staff of Nicholini's, and Mr Giovanni Greggio, a Waldorf Salad comprises a base of diced raw apples, celery, and walnuts, mixed with mayonnaise, the last-named should be freshly made and not poured out of a bottle.

Every restaurant varies the composition of its Waldorf Salad, but no restaurant would omit to have apple pieces, celery pieces and fresh mayonnaise.

However, Nicholini's managed to do that which no self-respecting restaurant would admit to doing: Not knowing what is a Waldorf Salad!

Amazing as it may sound, the staff member, who served TARGET's team, did not know what was a Waldorf Salad.

As a result, what TARGET received was a bed of raw spinach, some grated walnuts, and some balsamic vinegar.

Actually, this unique salad tasted quite nice and was easily devoured.

But it was not a Waldorf Salad.

Perhaps, TARGET may suggest that this concoction be called: The Nicholini's Salad.

As a Nicholini's Salad, TARGET would award it 6 points out of 10 points.

As a Waldorf Salad, TARGET would award it zero points out of 10 points.

The Main Courses

The specialty of the day was the Lobster Lasagna.

TARGET asked out waiter: *'Is it fresh? Do you make your own pasta, now?'*

On hearing the reply in the affirmative, TARGET promptly ordered it with gusto.

In the early days of Nicholini's, the fresh pasta used to be a special treat and this reviewer was looking forward to reliving those days when memories recorded the succulent taste of freshly made pasta, Italian style.

What TARGET received was a dish, which had all the appearances and taste of mashed potatoes.

The lasagna had been cooked to such an extent that the flat and wide strips of pasta had stuck to each other and melted into a solid lump.

And, then, the person in the kitchen continued cooking the pasta in a steamer/oven/whatever, and this had the effect of softening the pasta, again, so that it resembled mashed potatoes with a cheese flavour.

As for the lobster, it was, without question, frozen, in TARGET's opinion. If TARGET is in error, then, the small pieces of lobster must have been the previous day's fare.

What else could account for 2, small pieces of lobster meat, having no taste at all?

Further, the insipid-tasting lobster meat had the consistency of 2 small pieces of over-cooked beef.

As for the John Dory, a North Atlantic fish of the species, *'zeus faber'*, known not for its looks but for the delicacy of its flesh, it was terrible.

One smallish piece of the fish had been wrapped in a piece of bacon, which was so salty that it was completely inedible.

It is possible, of course, that the kitchen staff at Nicholini's did not realise how salty was the bacon, in which the fishmeat had been wrapped, but, if that was the case – in fact, it must have been the case – then Restaurant Chef Giovanni Greggio should take full responsibility for the error.

If he were there, of course.

The piece of fish came on a bed of risotto, but it appeared that the rice, used to create the risotto, was straight from Shanghai, not Italy.

The rice, which should have been cooked *'al dente'*, was mush.

The reason that TARGET suggests that the rice was of the Shanghainese variety was that the grains had the appearance of being fat and soft, very suitable for congee, in fact.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with Shanghainese rice, but it, really, is not suitable in the making of risotto.

This dish, like the lobster lasagna, was inedible.

No marks here for either main course.

This experience was relayed, through sources, to Chef Giovanni Greggio, who telephoned TARGET's office, clearly in a bit of a huff.

'I no know you come!' Mr Greggio told TARGET.

'Naturally! You were not there,' came the TARGET response.

'Why you no tell me the problemo?'

'I did not think that that was appropriate.'

'I use-a only Italiana rice. What is-a Shanghai rice? I no know it. I use only Carnaroli rice. I use-a Boston lobster-a – 20 ... 30 a day! You come-a see, I should show you-a.'

When asked about non-show of the Waldorf Salad, Mr Greggio said only: *'I do-na know. They* (meaning the staff of Nicholini's, no doubt) *no tell me you come.'*

Mr Greggio may sleep peacefully, for now on, because this reviewer will not be returning to Nicholini's for some time to come.

On a final note, TARGET discovered that the staff of the restaurant, at least, the staff that served TARGET, while trying very hard to please, did not know the difference between a sparkling wine from California and a Champagne.

Shame!

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