

Dining and Wining ... Where To Go ... Where Not To Go

THE BEST RESTAURANTS OF HONGKONG ... AND THE WORST !

Name of Restaurant

Scala, Renaissance Harbour View Hotel

Address of Restaurant

Number One, Harbour Road, Wanchai, Hongkong

Date of Visit

Thursday, September 13, 2007

CategoryTARGET's RatingService

First Impression	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Attentiveness to Customers' Needs	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Flexibility	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Product Expertise of Serving Staff	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Speed of Service	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Cleanliness of Uniform and Serving Staff	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Ambiance

Lighting	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Music	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
General	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Food

Presentation	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Taste	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Quantity	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
<u>Wine</u>			
Choice	Extensive	Limited	Unbalanced
Cost	Reasonable	Unreasonable	Very Expensive
Storage of Wine	Good	Poor	Unknown
Expertise of Sommelier --	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Total Cost of Meal

Very Expensive	Moderately Expensive	Very Reasonably Priced
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Name of Director of Food and Beverage

Mr Ricky Lam

Name of Executive Chef

Mr John Webster

Comments

If one is in love with ketchup, then, the restaurant to visit is Scala, the premier food outlet at Renaissance Harbour View Hotel, located at Number One, Harbour Road, Wanchai, the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

There is only a Chinese cook at this outlet – despite its Italian-sounding name and its pretensions of serving Italian cuisine – a Chinese cook who is in love with ketchup and, whenever possible, his dishes are loaded with the type of cheap tomato puree, found in large, 5-gallon tins, usually sold to hotels and restaurants with large clientele, comprising, mainly of North Americans.

TARGET () visited Scala on Thursday, September 13, 2007, at about 7:30 pm, without making any reservation.

This very well-appointed, little restaurant, which seats between 48 guests and 50 guests, only, has been very carefully and tastefully decorated; and, it has been that way for the best part of 2 decades, at least.

TARGET recalls visiting Scala, many, many years ago – when there was a decent chef in attendance.

Those days are gone, sad to state.

Today, one is at the mercy of a Chinese cook who is of the singular opinion that the manner of producing Italian food is to load it down with copious quantities of ketchup.

On the day of **TARGET**'s visit, this is that which was ordered:

Tasting Menu

Poached Scallop and Prawn
with Mesclun Salad and Lemon-dill Dressing

Lobster Bisque
with Truffled Crostini

Pan-Fried French Duck Liver
with Herbed Risotto

Home-Made Sorbet

Grilled Wagyu Beef Tenderloin
with Chive Mashed Potatoes,
Green Asparagus Chianti-Shallot Jus

Scala Dessert Delight
Panna Cotto, Tiramisu, Chocolate Pudding
Summer Berries Ice Cream

Coffee – Tea
Biscotti, Chocolate Grissini and Almond Tortino

\$HK600 per person

?La Carte

Mussels in a Tomato Saffron Broth
with Bruschetta
\$HK145

Vegetable Minestrone with Pesto
\$HK85

Organic Chicken and Spinach
Cannelloni with Tomato-Thyme Ragout
\$HK155

The First Courses

The first course of the Tasting Menu – the poached scallop and prawn, etc – was a cold dish, which was something of a surprise to this reviewer because the menu did say that the scallop was *‘poached’*.

TARGET is not averse to cold dishes, but it does appear that poached means something that is warm, not ice-cold.

As for the mussels *‘in a tomato saffron broth’*, the first course on the ?La Carte Menu, the saffron was not seen or tasted, but the ketchup was very much in evidence.

The strong flavour of the ketchup, of course, may have camouflaged the other flavours of this dish, but this reviewer thinks otherwise: There was only ketchup as the sauce.

The tomato flavour was exceedingly strong and, for Americans, especially those who relish hamburgers, they would have enjoyed this first course.

The Second Courses

The Lobster Bisque on the Tasting Menu was quite palatable although it was served in a demitasse.

One swallow and it was gone.

As for the Vegetable Minestrone of the ?La Carte Menu, well, that was a joke.

The only thing that was Italian about this soup was its name.

It contained, among other things, large slices of spinach or kale (or some other kind of green vegetable), something that any self-respecting Italian chef would never use in a minestrone.

And, of course, there it was again: Copious quantities of ketchup.

One could not state that it was poor ... just terrible!

The Third Courses

Things were getting worse, not better, by this time.

The Tasting Menu's third course was the French duck liver with herbed risotto.

When this dish was presented, on the first small mouthful, this reviewer found that that which was being consumed was a large crystal of sea salt.

In addition, the small teaspoonful of risotto which accompanied the sea salt was lukewarm!

What had happened, **TARGET** suspected, was that the risotto had been precooked and had just been warmed up in a microwave oven a few minutes before being served.

The sea salt, most likely, was an afterthought of some idiot in the kitchen.

The dish was sent packing.

As for the organic chicken and spinach cannelloni, well, this reviewer was able to find a little bit of grey, stringy animal matter which, one supposed, passed for '*organic*' chicken.

But, more to the point was the fact that the entire dish had been covered in ketchup – again!

Further, the spinach had been undercooked so that it had not molded itself into the pasta, making the entire dish almost inedible.

It was unbelievably bad!

The Fourth Course (of the Tasting Menu)

The grilled Wagyu beef tenderloin was very special: Never could one imagine (or expect) a 3-inch, circular piece of beef to be absolutely insipid.

TARGET has no idea how this had been accomplished – simply amazing!

If this reviewer had eaten this beef blindfolded, it would have been absolutely impossible to know what it was: Fish; foul; or flesh.

As for the chive mashed potatoes, the potatoes had been hopelessly overcooked with the water, seeping from the little mound of the grayish blob, making little pools of water on the plate and invading the tasteless, small piece of meat.

The Dessert Delight

TARGET is happy to report that there was no ketchup in the dessert.

The tiramisu, however, was at least 3 days' old and that was the reason that it was watery.

This reviewer gave up at this point.

Enough is enough!

The Wine

Being adventurous, **TARGET** chose a wine from Australia, one never seen in the past: Kies, Monkey Nut Tree from Barossa Valley, a Merlot of Vintage 2004.

It was excellent, really it was.

It was a very pleasant, tasting surprise.

At a cost of \$HK410 per bottle, this wine is a bargain.

It tasted of black currents and raspberries, wrapped in a merlot envelop.

It is a powerful wine, however, measuring 14.50 percent by volume.

There is a balance to this wine, one which could hardly be expected in view of the modest price of a bottle of 750 millilitres.

It was, without question, the best part of the meal.

The Service

While one may criticise the cook(s) of this outlet, one cannot criticise the service.

The staff try very hard to please all of the guests and they go out of their way to be pleasant in the face of adversity, brought about, one assumes, by being let down badly by the kitchen staff.

Full marks for the service.

No marks for the food.

According to Mr Ken Yeung, the Assistant Manager, one does not need a reservation for dinner because it never has more than half a dozen people, visiting the restaurant in the evenings.

TARGET supposes that there is little call for ketchup-laced, so-called Italian food in Hongkong.

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