

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

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

Name of Restaurant

Gaia Ristorante

Address of Restaurant

Hongkong

Date of Visit

Monday, March 10, 2008

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

Name of Food and Beverage Manager

Mr Pino Piano

Name of Chef

Mr Paolo Monti

Comments

Had it not been for the honesty of Mr Paolo Monti, this review of Gaia Ristorante would, without question, have been written a little differently.

However, in view of this medium's experience, the best slant that **TARGET** () can put on this Italian eatery is that it is horrible, a fraud, or, perhaps, a joke, if you will ... *'Why don't the Italians just stick to singing arias from Verdi's operas, such as the chorus from Nabucco, 'Va! Pensiero', and stop, messing around in kitchens?'*

Oh! By the way, Mr Paolo Monti claims to be the Executive Chef of Gaia Ristorante, that is, when he is cooking – which may not be all that often, by the look of things that **TARGET** noted.

TARGET visited Gaia on Monday, March 10, 2008, at exactly 6:30 p.m.

The restaurant is located on the Ground Floor of Grand Millennium Plaza, Number 181, Queen's Road, Central, Hongkong Island.

The ground floor of Grand Millennium Plaza is stunning and Gaia's seating arrangement includes spilling out onto the public area, similar, in fact, to the sidewalk, close to Rome's famous Excelsior Hotel on Via Veneto.

It is a real pity, therefore, that Gaia Ristorante cannot match the grandeur of its surroundings.

Ah! That's the pity of it, all!

On entering the dimly lit interior of the restaurant – **TARGET**'s team comprised militant non-smokers and the outside seating arrangement is reserved for those people who like to suck on cancer sticks – one is struck, almost immediately, by the fact that this restaurant, where the prices are very high, is without any real charm, at all.

It is as plain as plain can be.

The lack of soft furnishings means that sound travels from one corner of the restaurant to another.

This is not the place to bring a lady for a romantic night out, to be sure.

One is told that some architect charged the restaurant-owning company a great deal of money for the decor: Somebody got *'robbed'*, in **TARGET**'s opinion.

Of course, there is the adage that an architect is only as good as his client.

On being shown to a table, before this reviewer could even take off his jacket, the waiter, who had shown the position of the appointed place where **TARGET**'s duo was to spend the next hour or so, said: *'What you drinking?'*

One pondered, at this point:

'Are the serving staff trained to get people to put their bottoms on seats, as quickly as possible, order their

food in a hurry, then, get patrons to pay up, in a flash, so that there could be a higher turnover?’

After dismissing the Chinglish-speaking person, who had shown **TARGET** to the assigned table, and on scanning the wine list and the menu, this is that which was ordered:

Roman Jewish Style Deep Fried Artichokes
\$HK148

Vegetables Minestrone with Celery Root and Basil Pesto
\$HK98

Homemade Angel Hair with Black Truffle, Pork Cheeks and Peas Sauce
\$HK298

Silver Codfish Fillet, Baked with Black Olives, Capes, Herbs and Breadcrumbs
\$HK278

Traditional Tiramisu
\$HK88

Toasted Almond and Bittersweet Chocolate Mousse, Orange Sauce
\$HK88

And the wine, chosen for this memorable occasion:

Lombardia White
La Rocchetta Valcalepio Bianco DOCG 2005 (Pinot Grigio/Chardonnay)
\$HK650

The Food

Before starting in on the food, a few words, first, about the white wine: It was maiden’s water!

At \$HK650 per bottle, it is difficult to believe that any wine could be worse.

Wine is easy to create, actually, but making lousy wine is even easier.

La Rocchetta Valcalepio Bianco is a straw-coloured wine which is acidic in the extreme, having no discernable taste or having any attribute which could differentiate it from lukewarm water, poured over spent tea leaves.

The wine, however, is nothing to do with the restaurant so **TARGET** takes full blame for ordering this less-than-perfect, poorly fermented grape juice.

As for the food, however, the blame for the rubbish, served to **TARGET**, is, squarely, on the shoulders of the Executive Chef of Gaia, Mr Paolo Monti.

The description of ‘*Roman Jewish style deep fried artichokes*’ may not sit well with the Jewish community of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) because, aside from the fact that Jews are quite unlikely to cook artichokes in the fashion of Gaia, it is degrading of this group of religious people who make claim to being the first monotheists of the world.

TARGET wonders whether or not Gaia would have the courage to describe a certain dish as being a ‘*Roman, Black, Catholic homosexual style ...*’ etc?

(**TARGET**, also, ponders how many Jews still live in Rome, even 63 years after the conclusion of World War II when the city was occupied by storm troops of Nazi Germany, the mandate of those troops, being the eradication of all of the Jews in the world.)

Anyway, getting back to the Roman Jewish style deep fried artichokes, the single stalk of the vegetable was presented on a plate, underneath which was a piece of brown paper, the purpose of which was to soak up the oil that dripped off and in the artichoke.

Because this reviewer had never seen an artichoke, served in this fashion, the waiter was asked how it was to be eaten because, among other things, this reviewer had no fork.

The waiter did not know how to respond and said that he would ask somebody else as to the correct way to eat the artichoke.

Being a brave soul and, after having been given a fork and another knife, this reviewer picked up the carving instruments and took a chance.

Lo and Behold! One could slice right through the vegetable in a shot – and watch the oil spill forth!

It was, really, quite a brilliant way to de-oil the poor vegetable.

If one is appreciative of the taste of oil, one will, without question, enjoy this dish.

As for the soup, the taste was very mild and it was obvious that there was no base, having been created for this medley of vegetables, the kitchen, relying, solely, on the flavours of the vegetables to pull the soup together.

However, the kitchen forgot to put in any basil pesto into the soup or, for that matter, any seasoning.

Not that it would have made any difference, anyway.

The soup did not come off very well.

But it was very hot – full marks for the gas cooker or microwave oven!

The homemade angel hair with black truffle, pork cheeks and peas sauce could best be described as being Roman, Chinese style Lo Mien.

(Lo Mien is a dish which comprises noodles, a bowl of soup, some meat or fish pieces and whatever else one orders, all of the above, being placed on separate plates on one's table, allowing one to mix the ingredients, according to one's taste.)

The homemade angel hair dish, costing \$HK298, per person, was only slightly cold and the frozen peas were only partially frozen, mind you.

But where were the pork cheeks?

The waiter came over and explained to **TARGET** that the chef had created this dish so that the pork cheeks and all of the other ingredients melted into the sauce of the homemade angel hair.

Also, the waiter said that the chef had used the water from the frozen peas to give a '*peas flavour*' to the sauce and, thus, causing the pinkish colour to appear.

What a crock of s..t!

It was laughable but highly entertaining to listen to this nonsensical explanation about this abortion of a dish.

But there was no way that **TARGET** was going to eat this junk food.

The fish dish was another whopping error.

It, like the homemade angel hair, was a complete write-off.

It would be difficult to state that the fish was bad or that it was going off, but it smelt very strangely.

Even the herbs, which covered most of the fish, could not camouflage the fact that the fish did not taste fresh.

The meat of freshly baked/poached cod, when cut, comes away in slivers and has a distinctive taste.

In the case of the codfish, served to **TARGET** at Gaia Ristorante, it was cold and mushy and suggestive of fish that was on the borderline of going bad.

It was inedible!

TARGET asked the waiter about the fish and complained that it tasted as though it was not fresh.

He replied: '*Fresh cod is supposed to be mushy!*'

This waiter was, truly, amazing!

Perhaps, he should run in the US Presidential race?

As for the desserts, they were very good and **TARGET** cannot complain: They were eaten in full.

After asking for the bill, Mr Paolo Monti, a couple of his Italian friends in tow, entered the restaurant, and, after talking to the captain, came over to **TARGET**'s table.

He said, openly:

'I sorry about you experience. The cook in the kitchen did not follow my recipe.

'The angel hair had no pork cheeks. Sorry.'

With this, he left to look around the restaurant, which seats 100 patrons, inside, and another 100 smokers, outside.

And **TARGET** left, too.

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