

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

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

Name of Restaurant

Amigo

Address of Restaurant

Number 79A, Wong Nai Chung Road, Happy Valley, Hongkong

Date of Visit

Sunday, March 30, 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
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Name of Food and Beverage Manager

Mr Derek Kung

Name of Chef

Comments

One cannot but be impressed with Amigo, the 41 year-old, European-style restaurant of Happy Valley, the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of People's Republic of China (PRC).

The reason that **TARGET** () describes this free-standing restaurant as being '*European-style*' is because the cuisine is not, strictly, European, but a Chinese variation of quite a number of popular European dishes.

Amigo, which is the Spanish word for, friend, has all of the outward appearances of serving Spanish food – the decor, ambiance, and even the music – but, in fact, it serves a very good likeness of French food, Hongkong-style, only.

The business card of Amigo states, '*we serve the best french cuisine in town*', but don't believe it because this restaurant serves some of the best food in town, no doubt, but not strictly French cuisine.

The restaurant has, without question, shortcomings, however, on balance, it is as good as many, if not most, fine-dining outlets of 5-star hotels in the territory.

Last Sunday, **TARGET** arrived at Amigo at about 6:30 p.m. for what could only be described as a memorable evening.

The following is that which **TARGET** ordered so that this medium could have a fairly comprehensive sampling of the prepared foods that have made this restaurant as popular as it, clearly, is:

From The Set Menu

Seared Fresh Goose Liver with Turnips

Turtle Consommé with Crab Meat and Spinach Ravioli

Duck Breast on Wild Rice with Port Wine Sauce

Grand Marnier Soufflé

\$HK660

From The A La Carte Menu

Sliced Raw Beef prepared with the Chef's Own Recipe

\$HK210

Poached Sea Bass on a Bed of Romaine Lettuce
with Saffron Flavoured Champagne Sauce
\$HK320

Espresso Crème Brûlée

\$HK80

French Onion Soup

\$HK110

Veal Kidney Sauté with Capers, Leeks, Dijon Mustard and Madeira Wine

\$HK300

Napoleon Cake

\$HK70

Cheese Tray
\$HK100

(The above is exactly as it appeared on the menu).

The Set Menu Dishes

The Seared Fresh Goose Liver with Turnips was Heaven on a dish.

Whoever cooked this dish knew his onions (no pun intended), but it was, without question, prepared by a Chinese.

No French, German, Italian or even an English cook would have seared fresh goose liver, floating in such a large quantity of sauce.

But the sauce was excellent and tended to add zest to the overall dish.

The copious amount of sauce with many dishes, served at Amigo, appears to be a signature of this eatery.

If a point system were to be considered for this dish, **TARGET** would award it a high 8.50 points.

The Turtle Consommé with Crab Meat and Spinach Ravioli was a treat, to be sure, but there was very little taste of turtle and the Spinach Ravioli was very short on crab meat.

TARGET is not questioning that the soup had been made with turtle meat, but if one did not know what it was supposed to be, one would never have been able to guess the base stock of this soup.

Whether it was chicken or meat that had been used as a base for the soup, it was, nevertheless, quite tasty and deserved 7.50 points out of 10 points, in **TARGET**'s opinion.

The Duck Breast on Wild Rice with Port Wine Sauce was excellent, but, once again, the cook had made a great deal of sauce so that the duck breast, that melted in one's mouth, was virtually swimming in the stuff, the individual flavours of which had masked (a) the natural flavour of the duck (b) the spices, used in the delivery of the dish, and (c) the flavour of the Port.

However, no criticism could be ascribed here and the dish ranked about 8.50 points out of 10 points.

The Grand Marnier Soufflé was a bit of a wash-out and most coffee shops of hotels have similar soufflés, offered freely to guests.

No points here although there was not anything inherently wrong with the soufflé.

The A La Carte Menu

The Sliced Raw Beef, prepared with the Chef's Own Recipe, was unique, to be sure.

It was, also, Heaven on a plate.

The beef hails from New Zealand, a country that is not renowned for any excellence of meat, other than lamb (actually, there are

far more sheep in New Zealand than there are people).

However, Amigo's cook had created a type of white sauce '*to wash*' the meat, the sauce, tasting mildly of Dijon Mustard.

However, a passing waiter explained that the recipe for the sauce was a closely guarded secret, but resembled a type of Hollandaise Sauce, with a great deal more spices.

Whatever is the secret of the sauce, it was truly wonderful; the dish scored 9 points out of 10 points.

The Poached Sea Bass on a Bed of Romaine Lettuce with Saffron Flavoured Champagne Sauce was another winner and it is unlikely that any improvement of this dish were possible.

Sea Bass is a wonderful fish, no matter how it is cooked (except, perhaps, when the British get hold of it because most Brits have the propensity '*to kill*' any dish), and Amigo's variation on a classical theme is quite amazing.

Once again, this dish came with an over-abundance of sauce, but, in this case, the Saffron-flavoured Champagne Sauce was as tasty as the fish, itself, and one of **TARGET**'s team was heard to remark that mopping up the sauce with the very fresh French bread that was offered was not a bad idea.

The Sea Bass had only been partially cooked so that the flavours of the fish had not been completely obscured by the sauce.

And this dish scored 9.50 points out of 10 points.

The Espresso Crème Brûlée was not worthy of comment, although there was little wrong with it.

The trouble was that there was nothing to recommend it.

In fact, Amigo is weak on deserts, in this medium's opinion.

The French Onion Soup is the tradition soup that is served in many restaurants around town.

Little was new about this soup, but it was good and deserved at least 7 points out of 10 points.

The Veal Kidney Sautee with Capers, Leeks, Dijon Mustard and Madeira Wine was something else, again.

It was superb by any standard.

TARGET can think of no other superlative to describe this dish.

Yes, and the kidneys were '*floating*' in a copious quantity of sauce, the sauce, again, being a joy to behold.

For the most part, Chinese people do not enjoy '*dry*' food very much, and Amigo's cook obviously is cognisant of this fact so that, where-ever possible, dishes come with a great deal of sauce.

The sauces are as good as the meat/fish/fowl which are the key ingredients of dishes, the sauces, tending to embellish the food.

Once again, this dish scored 9.50 points out of 10 points.

As for the Napoleon Cake, back to the Isle of Elba, if you please.

The cheese tray, well, friends and neighbours, do not bother with cheese at Amigo because this restaurant appears to know little to nothing about cheese or, alternatively, the restaurant is not prepared to serve cheese._

The Wines

With the meal, **TARGET** ordered the following wines:

Puligny Montrachet, Vintage 2000
\$HK780

Saint-Julien
Chateau Ducru Beaucaillon
Vintage 1999

Grand Cru Classe de Medoc en 1855
\$HK1,450

The Puligny Montrachet was a classic, of course, and the pale yellow wine tasted something like green apples, just pulled off the tree.

The smooth flow of the wine on one's tongue opened up the taste buds for what was to come.

As for the Chateau Ducru Beaucaillon, it was sharp, full-bodied wine which, perhaps, would have been a little better if it had been aged a little longer.

The aftertaste was something like black currents.

However, time did not permit and **TARGET**'s team was thirsty.

With the duck and veal kidneys, it was a good choice of red wine.

The Restaurant

Originally, Amigo was in Causeway Bay, but shifted to its present location in 1976.

There are no European staff in the restaurant and the cooks are all Chinese.

The ambiance is, strictly, Spanish European – and rather romantic, too.

A team of musicians roam through the diners, numbering no more than 70, singing whatever one requests.

Not all of the staff are knowledgeable, however, because when **TARGET** asked one member of the staff about the vintage of the Puligny Montrachet, the answer came back: *'I think that that is a white (wine) ...'*

The tables are not too close together so that one is able to indulge in a romantic interlude without embarrassment.

All of the food is served piping hot, some of even served at the table.

This is a good restaurant and one can easily understand the reason that it is popular.

Full marks!

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