

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

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

Name of Restaurant

Cépage

Address of Restaurant

No. 23, Wing Fung Street, Wanchai, Hongkong

Date of Visit

Saturday, August 29, 2009

Category**TARGETs Rating****Service**

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

Wine -- NO COMMENT

Choice	Extensive	Limited	Unbalanced
Cost	Reasonable	Unreasonable	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 General Manager

Mr Randy See

Name of Executive Chef

Mr Thomas Mayr

Comments

Cépage came to the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), last December, and, since its opening, little has been written about it.

This is unusual for the territory, where eating out is almost a necessity to most of the residents, because, when a stand-alone restaurant is up to the calibre of Cépage, one would have thought that it would have become as well-known as some of the famous, fine-dining outlets of 5-star hotels of Hongkong Island and Tsimshatsui, Kowloon.

The restaurant is located alongside Pacific Place 3, at Number 23, Wing Fung Street, Wanchai.

It is not particularly easy to find and, probably, its location has caused it to become, in the words of William Shakespeare, 'The undiscover'd country ...'. (Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1)

TARGET () visited Cépage, last Saturday, at 7 p.m. and was pleasantly surprised at the restaurant's ambiance and décor.

It has every appearance of being among the best eateries in the territory if it maintains the present standards.

And it lived up to **TARGET**'s first impressions with one caveat (more about that, later).

The restaurant, which is part of a Singapore chain called, 'Les Amis Group', seats 26 people in the main dining area with another 3 private dining rooms, which are able to accommodate another 29 customers.

The ratio of serving staff to customers to is high, at about One:6.

All of the serving staff, with one exception, are extremely polite, clean, and have been groomed by the highest Singapore standards of service: One's glass is, immediately, topped up with whatever one is drinking, as an example of the high standard.

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

TABLE D'HÔTE

*Tuna belly carpaccio,
citrus fruit, lemon balm, Osciette caviar*

*Pan roasted Pollock fish from Brittany,
petits pois-potato ragout, chorizo from Joselito*

*Char grilled Iberian pork chop and apple,
baby spinach, girolle mushroom*

*Yellow peach tarte,
doughnut peach-champagne cocktail,*

raspberry sorbet

\$HK888

From the Main Menu, **TARGET** selected:

Classic Bouillabaisse, rouille tortellini, basil pesto
\$HK230

Trio of Anjou Pigeon – Oven roasted breast,
bacon wrapped and crispy fried leg,
served with heirloom carrot,
seasonal mushrooms, red baby Swiss chard
\$HK480

Cheese Board,
comprising 4 difference kinds of French cheeses
\$HK200

TABLE D'HÔTE

This 4-course meal was good, but not quite up to the standard of the courses, selected from the Main Menu, in this medium's opinion.

One could not state that there was anything radically wrong with any of the courses, it was just that they were not very exciting and, the moment ingested, the moment forgotten.

The tuna belly carpaccio was acceptable, but that was due, in large part, to the addition of the Osciétre Caviar.

Without the 3 dabs of caviar, the tuna, which had been sliced paper-thin, would have had no taste, at all.

The pan-roasted Pollock fish was almost insipid, too, but that was probably due to the fact that this fish has only the mildest of flavours, in any event.

The last dish, the Iberian pork chop, was on a par with the other 2 dishes.

The pork chop, itself, was tender enough, to be sure, but, without the addition of the grilled apple slices, which had to be eaten with each mouthful of meat, there was little flavour to the meat.

As for the dessert, well, let us not waste time on it, shall we?

One could comment, negatively, about any restaurant or about any dish, this medium realises, but in the case of Cépage and its tasting menu, it, really, was not the best.

The Main Menu

The Classic Bouillabaisse was not classic, at all, but it was very good, nevertheless.

Classic Bouillabaisse hails from Marseille, France: There is no Italian cook's substitute that may pretend to be the Classic Bouillabaisse.

Frauds are not permissible in Marseille or anywhere else.

The fish soup – because that is what it is, actually – is supposed to contain, fish, shell fish, vegetables, herbs and saffron.

In the case of this Italian chef's opinion, a bouillabaisse should contain Asian ingredients, such as shrimps, squid, and scallops as well as local fish.

The base of the soup was excellent and the addition of the Asian ingredients went down well enough.

If points were to be awarded to this soup, it would score at least 8 points out of 10 points.

The pigeon course was another winner.

The 3 parts of this French pigeon each had their own flavour, distinct and delicious.

With regard to this dish, the chef is to be complimented, most highly.

However, one noted, also, that insufficient attention had been paid to the accompanying vegetables.

This appeared to be a general failure of this restaurant since all of the accompanying vegetables with the entrées, sampled by this medium, were pretty much just there for show rather than to be devoured, along with the central theme of the courses.

The cheese board was yet another winner and, unlike some fine-dining restaurants in certain 5-star hotels of the territory, the cheese was at exactly the correct temperature.

No criticism could be levelled at the cheese board, with each of the 4 different kinds of cheese, being of the first quality.

But, it was during the course of this dish that **TARGET** became sadly disappointed.

TARGET had decided not to order any wine at this restaurant in order to ascertain whether or not a customer, not ordering wine, would be treated differently to the customer, spending large amounts of money in ordering wine(s).

The sommelier, a very rotund, Chinese man, on hearing that '*we do not drink*', quickly left the field in order to concentrate on other guests, who looked as though that they might order a bottle of wine ... or, even, 2 bottles of wine.

When the cheese board was ordered, this medium enquired from Mr Mariyanto Aribowo, the Assistant Manager, whether or not the restaurant could grace the cheese board with a sweet wine, such as a glass of Port or a sauternes.

Mr Mariyanto Aribowo, an Indonesian by birth who had spent some time in Singapore, learning his trade, said that he would send over the sommelier to talk to us.

The sommelier came over about 5 minutes later, armed with a small bottle of something and made mention of '*road*', which turned out to be Rhone, France, and, quickly poured some of the yellow liquid into a glass – then tried to rush away, quickly.

TARGET, however, was a little quicker than this obese gentleman and grabbed at the very cold half-bottle of wine and discovered that it was, in fact, from France and not Italy as had, originally, be suggested by the word, '*road*'.

On tasting this wine, it resembled peach juice that had been watered down, considerably.

It was terrible! It did not taste like wine, at all.

The sommelier had not given **TARGET** an opportunity to select a dessert wine, but, instead, assumed – one can only conjecture – that the party that he was serving was completely ignorant about wine.

Little did he know.

The one glass of wine, described on the receipt as having been Domaine Grangeon Cuvee, cost \$HK160.

After one sip, it was pushed to one side.

Now, this is not the way a sommelier should serve a customer in a restaurant of the calibre of Cépage, which rates at least one star in this medium's opinion.

The usual procedure is for the sommelier to pour a little of the wine of the house into a glass in order that the guest may determine whether or not it is acceptable to his or her palate.

Had that been done, **TARGET** would have rejected it and ordered a decent bottle of a sauternes, a glass of vintage Port, or something else from the wine list.

It was true, in defence of this fat, ignorant man, that he was busy, serving 6 Europeans who had just entered the restaurant and had started to drink a bottle of Champagne and had ordered other wines to boot.

Thus, there is a lesson to be learned about snobbish sommeliers who claim to have a little knowledge of wine, but, clearly, have no knowledge of good manners or acceptable service in accordance with their claimed expertise.

The Ambiance

Cépage has all the makings of an excellent, fine-dining restaurant.

One notes this almost as soon as one is seated.

The serving staff, 4 of whom have been imported from Singapore, do not talk among themselves, other than to exchange information about a certain guest's requests, and each and every one of them has, clearly, been instructed in the exacting art of service.

At each and every table, there is what this medium would describe as an accessory stool so that ladies and gentlemen may plonk their bags (or what-have-you) down on these stools.

It appears that the senior serving staff is only too willing to spend time with a guest who has a special request or who wants to

know a little about the restaurant.

The kitchen staff comprises 9 people, led by the Italian Executive Chef, a Mr Thomas Mayr.

Cépage has rented the space in its building from The Swire Group of Companies and it is only too obvious that many millions of dollars have been spent on tarding up this old building, befitting the level of excellence that it demands from its cooking and serving staff.

While the obese sommelier may be more than a bit of a nit, one should not allow this person's incompetence and stupidity to detract from the fact that Cépage is a very good restaurant.

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