

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

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

Name of Restaurant

The French Window

Address of Restaurant

Level 3, IFC Mall, Central, Hongkong

Date of Visit

Wednesday, March 2, 2011

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 - Not Offered

Choice	Extensive	Limited	Unbalanced
Cost	Reasonable	Unreasonable	Expensive
Storage of Wine	Good	Poor	Unknown
Expertise of Sommelier	Excellent	Acceptable	None

Total Cost of Meal

Very Expensive **Moderately Expensive** Very Reasonably Priced

Name of Food and Beverage Manager

Management refused to say

Name of Master Chef

Mr Stephane Haissant

Comments

Since **TARGET**'s last review of The French Window (please refer to **TARGET** Intelligence Report, Volume XII, Number 78, published on Wednesday, April 28, 2010), there has been quite a number of material changes at this fine-dining establishment, the most-important of which, of course, being the ousting of its last (and first) European chef de cuisine and replacing him with Mr Stephane Haissant, who is described as being The Master Chef.

But there is, still, plenty of room for improvement at this very lovely restaurant, overlooking, as it does, Victoria Harbour from the Third Level of IFC Mall, Central, Hongkong Island.

This medium revisited The French Window on Wednesday, March 2, 2011, having booked a table under an assumed name.

On studying the menu, this is that which was chosen by **TARGET**'s reviewing team:

Chef's Menu

Salad

Salmon, Potato, Caviar Sauce Salad

Soup

Cream of Watercress

Fish

Cod with Zucchini Risotto

Main Course

Wagyu Beef Cheek, Stuffed Vegetable

Dessert

Soufflé, vanilla with chocolate

Price: \$HK888

A La Carte Menu

*Glazed Green Asparagus with Smoked Sturgeon and Caviar
\$HK190*

*Grilled Pigeon Stuffed with Foie Gras, button Mushroom Sangri
\$HK490*

*Yellow Lemon Sable, Sea Salt Caramel
\$HK190*

TARGET did not order any wine because, prior to attempting to enter the restaurant at about 6:15 p.m. – the restaurant opens at 6:30 p.m. – our team was denied entrance even to ordering a bottle of bubbly (the Australian slang word for Champagne or any effervescent wine) in order to drink it at the table, awaiting the official opening of the dining service, just to relax a little before

starting work.

Anyway, nobody at The French Window offered this reviewer the wine list to scan.

(The work of reviewing restaurants and their various foods is a very difficult task, for **TARGET** Subscribers who may have never had such an onerous occupation, and, aside from having acute taste buds for the job, one must, also, have the stomach, befitting the duty. This reviewer is the personification of the latter-mentioned, anatomical requirement.)

Having been seated at another, nearby restaurant, imbibing a bottle of French wine and noshing on a small selection of French cheeses for the best part of 45 minutes, **TARGET** sauntered back to The French Window and was, on this occasion, admitted into the inner sanctum.

The restaurant's appearance has not changed, appreciably, except that the table settings were a little more reasonable in that the utilitarian aspect of the dishes had replaced, such silly ideas as a flat piece of glass on which, in earlier times, one was supposed to pour olive oil for one's bread and watch the oil seep over the flat glass onto the tablecloth.

Also, it appeared that the serving staff had, almost completely, been replaced.

And, of course, the former, peripatetic chef de cuisine, Mr Mickaer Le Chalvez, thought to have been one of the members of the Lost Tribe of Israel, who found it very difficult to locate the restaurant's kitchen on **TARGET**'s first review, probably due to his penchant for wandering, aimlessly, has been replaced by Mr Stephane Haissant, who is a Frenchman.

The Food

Starting from The Chef's Menu, perhaps Master Chef Stephane Haissant had been instructed to prepare mainly low-sodium dishes because most of the cooked food that was tasted, last Wednesday, required salt to be added, at least, that was this reviewer's opinion.

This is not to suggest that there was anything wrong with the majority of the dishes, but they did require something to perk them up a little.

The first course, the Salad – Salmon, Potato, Caviar Sauce – had little to no flavour although its contents were slightly recognisable. To some people, no doubt, mildly flavoured food is the best food, at least, one might suppose this.

The second course, the Cream of Watercress Soup, was perfection, being very tasty, creamy (which is that which it should have been), and tasting strongly of its ingredients. However, it did require salt to be added to it.

The third course, Cod with Zucchini Risotto, was another outright winner, the fish, having been cooked so that the centre of the one-inch piece of the saltwater fish remained slightly undercooked – which is perfect, of course.

The fourth course, the Wagyu Beef Cheek, Stuffed Vegetable, was not very good at all, however.

TARGET finds it difficult to blame any cook for the fact that the beef cheek was completely insipid, and even the strong-tasting sauce, that had been poured over the cube of meat and vegetables, could not embellish the taste of the dish because the meat, having come from Australia – according to the serving staff – is like that: Nearly tasteless.

When a cow eats only grass all of its life, then, on slaughtering it, the taste of its meat will reflect that which the poor animal has eaten.

One suspects that the chef might be slightly hamstrung in that pricing of raw produce must be very difficult if one is dictated to by some pen-pusher, who watches costs and tries to keep them down to a bare minimum.

As for the fifth course, the soufflé, it was absolute perfection – top marks!

The A La Carte Dishes

Aside from the fact that the first course – Glazed Green Asparagus with Smoked Sturgeon and Caviar – was presented as a little picture of a white plate, the taste of the glazed asparagus, which had been blanched, maintained the clear flavour of the spear-shaped young shoots of the asparagus plant.

However, once again, this dish needed to have salt added to it.

The second course from the A La Carte Menu, the Grilled Pigeon Stuffed with Foie Gras, button Mushroom Sangri, when presented on the table, looked exceedingly pleasing, but on trying to slice through one piece of the little dead and dissected bird, it was discovered that the pigeon meat was, completely, raw!

On ordering this dish, a member of the serving staff had, indeed, asked how the pigeon should be cooked and went to the kitchen with the instructions that it should be well done.

On noticing that the pigeon meat was oozing out blood and some other clear liquid, the French Assistant Manager, Mr Thomas Luthier, quickly whisked it away without a word.

About 8 minutes later, the dish was returned, having been recooked, only.

This incident ruined the entire dish, in this reviewer's opinion, because (a) it was clear that nobody in the kitchen had been held accountable for the faux pas and (b) on trying to correct the problem, the first attempt should have been thrown into the dustbin and replaced by another dead and dissected bird.

As for the dessert, this dish should be taken off the menu: It was just a biscuit with some yellow paste on top of it.

The Restaurant

The French Window can accommodate about 80 diners and it, really, a very pretty restaurant.

The latest addition to the cooking staff is Mr Stephane Haissant, who was installed in his present position about 8 weeks ago.

The Chinese serving staff is good and tries to meet the highest standards although, thanks to the rather poor example, set by Mr Thomas Luthier, they must have noted that this young man only seems to be interested in guests who speak French.

Putting a man into a black jacket does not a maître d'hôtel make to be sure.

The butter that is served at the table is from France, **TARGET** learned; it is wonderful, along with the freshly baked (or warmed) assortment of breads.

Once the wrinkles are ironed out of the kitchen, this restaurant could well rival many 5-star restaurants in this little town, called Hongkong.

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