

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

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

Name of Restaurant

The Principal

Address of Restaurant

Ground Floor, No. 9, Star Street, Wanchai, Hongkong

Date of Visit

Tuesday, December 18, 2012

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 -- None	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
General	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Food

Presentation	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Taste	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Quantity	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Wine

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
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Name of Restaurant Manager

Mr Arturo Sims

Name of Executive Chef

Mr Jonay Armas

Comments

THE PRINCIPAL:
FIRST APPEARANCES ARE NOT, ALWAYS, LASTING ONES

Our waiter claimed that the restaurant had 10 cooks in the kitchen, the Executive Chef, being Spanish, two sous chefs, hailing from Australia and the United States, and the remaining seven cooks, all being Chinese.

This little 'army' prepares and cooks for a restaurant that can seat just 75 people.

Difficult to believe, isn't it?

Well, that was that which **TARGET** () was told by the waiter, named Alex, who was serving our table on Tuesday, December 18, 2012, at about 7:10 p.m. This restaurant, located on the border between Wanchai and Admiralty, is called The Principal.

On sampling the food for a little more than two hours, it was very apparent that the people in the kitchen were, most likely, all Asians and ne'er a European had soiled his hands in the preparation of this medium's select dishes, although, to be fair, European thinking must have gone into the preparation and presentation of the dishes.

But the food, actually, was middling to fair, nevertheless – because Chinese cooks are among the best in the world, in any event, and can, if they so desire, turn their hands to prepare just about any cuisine, sometimes to a high degree.

On the evening of **TARGET**'s visit to The Principal, this was that which was ordered, copied, exactly, as written on the small menu:

Starters

FOIE

Seared, Oats Stones Beet, Plum Balsamic Caviar
\$HK270

LANGOUSTINE

Norway a la Plancha, Sofrito, Pacada, Curry
\$HK335

63° EGG

Free range, Artichokes, (Australian) truffle (shavings)
\$HK220

Main Courses

VENISON

Jerusalem artichokes, Chanterelles, Chestnuts, Grelots
\$HK460

SALTBUSH LAMB

*Tenderloin, Sweetbreads, Eggplant, Chickpeas,
Ras El Hanoat Yoghurt
\$HK395*

*BEEF
Grilled Sirloin, Bone Marrow, Burnt Leaks, Zucchini
\$HK395*

Deserts

*PIÑA COLADA
Coconut foam, Pineapple sorbet,
White rum jelly, Coconut Meringue
\$HK130*

*CREMA CATALANA
Pistachio, Basil Sorbet, Raspberry Croquant Berries
\$HK130*

Along with the above, **TARGET**, on the suggestion of the sommelier, ordered a bottle of Spanish wine at the cost of \$HK560. It was Anima Negra 'AN/2' Mallorca Callet, Mantonegre-Fogoneu, Vintage 2006.

(Sometimes, as this reviewer has come to learn, it is better to trust one's own judgment than accept the suggestion of somebody else's, especially if that person, regardless of ethnicity, is young.)

The Starters

The Foie – goose liver – was terrible!

Aside from this dish, being lukewarm, bordering on being cold, it was undercooked. Clearly, the frying pan had not been sufficiently heated before the lump of liver was placed on it: The idiot who attempted to cook this dish had no idea what to do.

The langoustine, all three of them, each measuring about two inches long, tasted of the herbs and what-have-you that had been used in the cooking process.

The trouble with this dish was that the poor langoustines, also known as Dublin Bay prawns, had been frozen, the powdery texture of the meat, being a telltale indication of this in addition to the water that seeped out from under the shells.

As for the 63° egg, it was fine, having been a poached egg that had been placed on a plate and partially covered with shavings of an Australian truffle.

The Main Courses

When the three main courses came, they all looked very similar, all having been presented in almost the same manner!

Whereas, **TARGET** had requested that the venison and the lamb should be well-cooked, the beef, being medium-well cooked, all of the meat, placed on the table, had been prepared just a tad over rare.

Regardless of the presentation of the meat, they, all, tasted very similar.

To cook lamb so that it tastes as though it were beef is something very special, but somebody in the kitchen had found a method to perform this feat.

Still on the matter of the lamb, which was supposed to be accompanied with sweetbreads, these glandular pieces either the thymus or pancreas of a young animal – usually, either a calf or lamb – were almost impossible to locate until a black-jacketed official of the restaurant pointed out that the quarter-inch, blackened fried lump, hiding under a piece of meat.

As for the beef and the venison, they, both, tasted so much alike that, on a blind-tasting competition, this reviewer would be hard-pressed to be able to tell the difference.

As for the Spanish wine, well the least said of it, the best.

The Desserts

Of all the dishes, sampled by his medium, the deserts were far the most surprising and, the best tasting.

TARGET is not a fan of sorbets, but the two sorbets, tasted on this evening, were superb.

It is unlikely that this reviewer will, ever, return to The Principal, but, if it is transpired that there were to be a second tasting, the deserts would not be forgotten._

Conclusion

If a point count were to be ascribed to the food of The Principal, with a 10, being perfection, then that point count would look like this:

	Desserts	8.50 points
	The Main Courses	3.50 points
	The Starters	<u>3.00 points</u>
TOTAL	<u>15.00 POINTS</u>	(out of a total of 30 points).

The Principal is a well-outfitted eatery in an area that has, over the past decade or so, been upgraded from the slum that it, previously, used to be thanks to the material investments of cash by the Swire Group of Companies, starting with the construction of the popular residential complex, named Star Crest, having been the focal point of that which was to follow.

The restaurant is clean and, clearly, well managed. It only hires Chinese serving staff, it appears.

The serving staff, although many of them cannot pronounce the names of a number of the dishes and most of the wines, is well trained and go out of their way to be helpful when called upon so to do.

While the wine list is very interesting to scan, it is obvious, on talking to the Chinese sommelier, that the staff has little to no idea about wines although bullshit does go a long way in the service industry, doesn't it?

It would appear to this medium that a great deal of emphasis has been placed on service – which is all well and good – but the kitchen staff is not a patch on the attempts of the serving staff, at least that was the situation on **TARGET**'s visit.

How long this restaurant will survive is up to the determinations of culinary gods, Zeus, being the chief deity of the Greece pantheon, but, unless something is radically changed in the kitchen, it is likely that The Principal will have to be relocated to cheaper premises – unless it is decided to close its doors, permanently.

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