

**THE RITZ-CARLTON'S TOSCANA :  
ITALY WAS NEVER THIS BAD EVEN DURING WORLD WAR II**

TARGET cannot recall a meal as bad as the one served on Friday, October 22.

Or of having to reject a dish, outright – because the dehydrated penne (pasta) was almost completely uncooked.

And TARGET cannot ever recall one of its guests, stating openly: *'This is among the worst European meals that I have ever had in Hongkong.'*

But that was exactly what happened when TARGET dropped in on the Italian premier restaurant at The Ritz-Carlton on this sunny Friday afternoon at about 12:45 pm.

Toscana is, without question, an elegant-looking restaurant.

Unfortunately, on the day that TARGET visited it, the food was a far cry from the elegance of the décor.

TARGET had invited a well-known celebrity to accompany its reviewer to this 80-seater restaurant in order to taste, what many people think is, among the best Italian cuisine in this little *'village'*.

Take it from this reviewer; the food at Toscana can be lousy.

TARGET and its guest both chose the Executive Set Lunch on October 22. This comprised the following:

Penne alla Puttanesca

(Penne Pasta with Black Olives, Capers and Spicy Tomato Sauce)

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Scaloppine di Vitello al Marsala

(Thin Scallop of Veal in Marsala Wine Sauce with Mashed Potatoes)

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Dolci Dalla Credenza

(Select your favourite dessert from the Credenza)

The cost of the above is far from being cheap and, at \$HK228 a head, plus a 10-percent Service Charge, one would think that one would be eating some of the best food in the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

What TARGET and its guest was stuck with, on the Friday that we were unfortunate enough to select this outlet as a venue for a food review, was a complete fraud of an Italian luncheon.

**The First Course:**

The first course, the Penne alla Puttanesca, was a dehydrated pasta which had been doused in a fresh tomato sauce which, in turn, had been laced with Tabasco Sauce (or some other substitute for this Iberia, Louisiana, hot pepper sauce) and topped off were a couple of black olives.

TARGET and its guest, having tasted just one forkful of the penne, immediately called over the Chinese Captain and explained to him that the penne just about cracked when one bit down on it – because it was almost completely uncooked.

The Captain said: *'Sorry. You don't like it? We serve our pasta "al dente".'*

TARGET's guest said, before this reviewer could explain the problem to the Chinese Captain: *'This is not "al dente"; it has never been cooked!'*

The Captain quickly retreated with the 2 bowls of semi-cooked pasta and returned, about 15 minutes later, to explain that new dishes of pasta were being prepared, but this time *'... we cook it longer for your taste.'*

The cheek!

To begin with, there appears to be no reason that, for the amount of money that this restaurant is charging for its food, one cannot expect fresh pasta; and, for the amount of money that this restaurant is charging for its food, there is no reason that patrons have to be subjected to such rubbish, bearing an Italian name – prepared by some flunky, who does not know the simplest thing about cooking.

There is a difference between serving a dehydrated pasta *'al dente'* and serving a dehydrated pasta, which still cracks as one's teeth bears down on it.

When the second attempt at this dish was placed on the table, the pasta was *'al dente'* – and, in fact, it was at all bad.

This reviewer did not like it too much, but that is a personal preference.

TARGET's guest enjoyed the tomato sauce and the 2 black olives, and agreed that it was worth a score of at least 4 points out of 10 points.

### **The Main Course:**

Since it appeared that Toscana had made good its mistake with regard to the pasta, and since, as TARGET remarked to its guest, *'Any restaurant is entitled to make one mistake'*, this reviewer fully expected that the main course would vindicate the outlet and its reputation.

Not on your Nelly!

The Scaloppine de Vitello al Marsala was terrible!

It comprised 2 pieces of fatty veal, a tablespoon of mashed potatoes, and some boiled French beans.

The veal was about the cheapest cut that one could imagine; and, it was completely tasteless.

As for the mashed potatoes: The water was still oozing out of them.

It was clear what had happened: When the potatoes had been mashed, the idiot in the kitchen had failed to drain off all the water from the original boiling process.

TARGET's guest said: *'I thought that mashed potatoes are supposed to be made from milk and butter?'*

(Good point for a Chinese gentleman, who is not completely conversant with the art of the preparation of European cuisine, but, clearly, has been around European food, long enough, to realise that something was amiss with this meal)

The French beans had, also, been boiled (along with the watery potatoes?) and were insipid.

What happened to the Marsala Wine Sauce?

Somebody had made a complete botch of the dish.

No points.

If anything, Toscana's Management should have paid TARGET for suffering in this restaurant from 12:45 pm to 2:26 pm on this Friday afternoon.

### **The Dessert:**

The dessert was on a par with the half-cooked penne and the attempt at Scaloppine de Vitello al Marsala: Terrible!

There were 7 cooked selections on the credenza; and, they all had one thing in common: They were tasteless.

TARGET's guest again: *'This is really very bad!'*

It was bad.

The cooking was bad.

The senior Chinese service staff was bad.

The European Restaurant Manager is a joke -- since he was not even aware as to how bad was the situation in this once, proud restaurant.

This meal for 2 people, costing \$HK677.60, was, without doubt, the worst European meal that TARGET has been forced to endure for many a year.

The restaurant needs a chef, or, if it has a chef, then he should get on top of his job.

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