

# Oysters with a view

Right at the top of the Sheraton Hotel and Towers in Hong Kong is a long corridor of restaurants that take advantage of the view outside the windows. And right at the end of that is the hotel's famous Oyster and Wine Bar.

It offers a lot more than shellfish and wine, of course, and is a showcase of arguably the best seafood in town.

An oyster bar with a selection that takes you right round the world and back gives you a taste of both Atlantic and Pacific shellfish, with some from Down Under as well. Hong Kong imports its seafood all year round, taking its pick of the best of the seasons from both hemispheres.

The natural, painless choice is to opt for the generously tiered layers of the seafood platter. If you go for dinner, the bistro board will also be brought to you, and a server will patiently explain the chef's picks of the day to you.

White asparagus was in season when I took my mother to dinner that night, so we ordered a velvety veloute that was flavorful and so delicious we wanted more. But then our seafood platter arrived.

It was a feast for both the eyes and the mouth. Oysters, scampi, king prawns, whelk, scallops, mussels and salmon sashimi with flying fish roe formed an edible mosaic that had our gastric juices rumbling in anticipation.

Little bowls of tart red-wine vinegar with chopped shallots, creamy homemade tartar sauce and a platter of lemon wedges were all the seasoning we needed.

We started with the oysters of course, and each was briny and sweet and bore no trace that it had traveled far to reach our table.

The mussels were rimmed with bright orange roe, and the prawns cooked just right.

Keeping a prawn crisp and sweet is a kitchen secret that is hard to master. Many a seafood platter has been laden with overcooked prawns that end up like "tasteless boiled tapioca, mushy and tasting of damp sawdust", according to the mater.

She was happy with her lobster as well, and pointed out that the coral in the head was cleanly cooked and not left liquid. I was too busy extracting meat from the whelks and enjoying their sea-salt sweetness. Dipping them into the red wine vinaigrette was just gilding the lily.

Seafood and sparkling wines is a natural match, and we ordered two glasses of French champagne. The Oyster and Wine Bar has a good selection to suit all pockets.

One of the best side dishes when you dine here in the evening is the fabulous neon display that lights up Victoria Harbor at 8 pm. It's a sight that always moves me, and makes me reconsider if I should move back to Hong Kong.

It's just colored lights running up and down buildings, a wide expanse of water and a cityscape that changes every year. But it's Hong Kong, and there's just something about this city that draws the adventurous and the sentimental.

And when you are enjoying good food and fine wine as well as the view, it takes on magical proportions.

Contact the writer at  
paulined@chinadaily.com.cn

## IF YOU GO

### OYSTER AND WINE BAR

Sheraton Hong Kong Hotel and Tower, 20 Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong.  
+852 2369 1111

Average cost per diner: HK\$500 (\$65)  
Recommended: Seafood platter

It's a platter of marine delights that would do Paris proud, but the panoramic view of Victoria Peak and the famous harbor is proof that it's much nearer home. **Pauline D. Loh** samples the champagne and seafood.



Oyster and Wine Bar's seafood platter is a feast for both the eyes and the mouth.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Hunan charmer in Shanghai

By **LI XINZHU** in Shanghai  
lixinzhu@chinadaily.com.cn

This is a charming little restaurant sitting quietly on Wuyuan Road of Xuhui district, so laid-back that pedestrians may walk right past it without any notice.

Looking in from the outside, it's hard to tell what it is — until you spot the name that is carved onto the iron wall by the main entrance.

Spicy Moment is a Hunan restaurant and bar.

It certainly exudes style at first sight. With about 50 seats inside, the restaurant has successfully bridged natural wood furniture with modern objets d'art.

All tables are made of wood stained the original color, but the seats and sofas are upholstered in gold patent leather. Pillows in light green and gray color are hung against the wall above sofas for the comfort of diners.

A decor wall in the center of the restaurant is another eye-catching object. Instead of the usual wood, this is a wall made of abacuses.

The space is designed by Dant Deng, the owner, in his 40s, and he has drawn inspiration from his years of experience in the advertising and design industry. For him, the initial objective was to open a restaurant for his friends to gather.

Unlike most Hunan dishes that are heavy with oil spices, the food offered at Spicy Moment is more inspired by what Deng used to eat at home, the flavors he is used to.

"Not all Hunan people eat oily and spicy," Deng says.

Deng also shops at the supermarkets for his ingredients because he still has issues with restaurant suppliers, and says he prefers this channel because it is more reliable, even if it costs more.

Deng is equally fastidious when it comes to food preparation.

"I would rather spend more time getting the best flavor out of the ingredients than take a shortcut and add extra spices to season the food," he says.

For this reason, diners at Spicy Moment must be prepared to wait. Food may be slow in coming out of the kitchen especially during the peak hours. But for some, the wait is worth every moment.

Hand-torn Cabbage, one of the best known of Hunan dishes, is extremely popular. In other restaurants, the dish may take just five minutes to prepare, but here, it may take a bit longer as the chef takes time to make sure the best flavors are presented on the plate.

Deng says he is not interested in opening a restaurant where people just rush in and out. He wants diners to relax, sit and talk or make new friends as they enjoy his food.

Another slow-food specialty from the restaurant is the steamed fish head with chopped pickled chili peppers and spring onions. This signature dish has enjoyed exceptionally high ratings on dianping.com, an online gourmet guide.

Deng plans to open up a VIP room at the back of his restaurant soon, where patrons can enjoy a limited degustation menu, Hunan-style.

## IF YOU GO

### SPICY MOMENT

11:30 am-2:30 pm, 4:30-9:30 pm, 71 Wuyuan Road, Xuhui district, Shanghai. 021-5403-0775

Average price per person: 100 yuan (\$16)



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The steamed fish head with chopped pickled chili peppers and spring onions is a signature dish of Spicy Moment.

## Haute Italian with color

By **YE JUN**  
yejun@chinadaily.com.cn

To stand head and shoulders above the many good Italian restaurants in Beijing, the food must be truly exceptional — and memorable. During a recent visit to Daccapo, the Italian restaurant at the Regent Beijing, I went away with clear memories of two dishes.

One was the shrimp bisque and roasted shrimp, which more than matched the best seafood I had tried in Italy. It had that fresh sea taste that makes you go "wow" and think, "that's how seafood should be".

The other dish was a Boston lobster salad, with orange jelly and edible flowers. The tender lobster is presented on a canvas of herbs and vegetables, artistically placed on a bed of orange gelatin.

I had been to Daccapo before its current relocation, but no dish had left such deep impressions.

The restaurant recently moved to make space for Morton's, the American steakhouse that is scheduled to open at the hotel in mid-October.

Daccapo's chef Mario Cittadini says his restaurant business is better than ever.

The restaurant is now cozier, with an ambience more conducive to private and fine dining. There is comfortable wood and leather furniture, oil paintings and gauze curtains. In comparison, it was more business like before its move.

Cittadini says the restaurant has changed what it offers to guests. For one, pizzas are now off the menu.

"Everybody makes pizza," he says. "It's only a small part of Italian food, like rice in Chinese cuisine."

Looking at the menu and what it offers, it's hard to miss the pizzas.

"We have brought in more typical and varied Italian food, and we are still keeping the signature dishes," says Cittadini, who is also the executive sous chef of the hotel.

There are now Italian cold cuts, such as salami, mortadella, and cuppa, and the chef has added porchetta, the traditional suckling pig roll with sausage stuffing, and osso buco with saffron risotto and bone marrow. Pasta is handmade.

The shrimp bisque and roast shrimp is also a new dish and the ingredients come from China. Pan-fried wild sea bass is paired beautifully with confit fennel, and beef cheek is slow



## IF YOU GO

### DACCAPO ITALIAN RESTAURANT

Monday-Friday, 11:30 am-2:30 pm, 5:30-10:30 pm. Dinner only during weekend. 2/F Regent Beijing, 99 Jinbao Jie, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-8522-1888 ext 3826

YE JUN / CHINA DAILY

The shrimp bisque and roasted shrimp is a specialty of Daccapo Italian Restaurant in Beijing.

braised for 12 hours to offer the softest texture.

"Sixty percent of the flavor comes from the ingredient, and 40 percent is from the chef," Cittadini says. "The restaurant only orders the best seafood we can find."

"We buy all the best we can find in the market, then play with it in the style of modern Italian cuisine, but with traditional flavor. You have to understand the ingredient, how to play with it, and you have to study."

He says he goes back to Italy to keep himself updated of new styles in Italian cuisine as those in China are different because the product and the market are different. He admits he

tries to keep the flavor of food easy for local patrons to understand.

"Sometimes we cannot make it 100 percent authentic Italian because the Asian palate might not like it," he says. For example, Chinese diners may not like very strong cheese.

The chef has been trying Chinese food because he says the experience helps him understand what local diners appreciate.

"For example, the Chinese like their noodles soft, and the same applies to rice," the chef notes. But, there are some universal truths.

"Food is beautiful by itself. I just make sure it is cooked well."