



**Food
& Drink**

Edited by Dorothy So • d

A Chucking good time

Cooking show host and restaurateur Chuck Hughes talks about the reality of the restaurant biz and his newfound love for durian.

By **Dorothy So.**

Portrait by

Calvin Sit

Chuck Hughes, March 7,
photographed at The Mira

Hi Chuck! What got you interested in cooking?

I studied marketing and when I got my first [internship], I enjoyed it but didn't love it. My mom's actually always known and she said, 'go to cooking school'. And even when I was going to school in marketing, I was working at restaurants at night or on weekends. As much as I was a busboy, a bartender, I was also picking things up in the kitchen. It was really a natural progression and I just went to cooking school. On the first day I was hooked. I realised, finally I belonged somewhere.

When did you open your first restaurant Garde-Manger?

I started working in restaurants when I was 16 but really [in the] kitchens, I would say 19. I opened my restaurant when I was 29, 28? So it was almost 10 years. My two partners, who are really my best friends, called me and said 'we found a spot in old Montreal that could be good'. And I was at that point where [I was] kind of in a slump and was on the verge of leaving Montreal. I was working for great restaurants and I was having a great time but without ownership, you're just working for other people. The natural progression is either you become executive chef or something needs to happen. So when they called, it was really the right time at the right place.

What was it like to finally open?

The restaurant was a dump when we got it. It's in this 400-year-old part of the city and had been closed for five or six years. The guy who owned it was an 82-year-old blind man. He'd been blind for 40 years so he hadn't seen the place in a long time. The building's 200 years old so the whole basement was filled with junk.

Was it difficult to get it all sorted?

We were finding fireplace grills and all kinds of old chairs that were sorta cool. We had no money so we refurbished, recycled, reused pretty much everything that was there. It was very organic. When we were doing it, we didn't really think of design. We were just like 'let's put that there, let's put this here', and there's this huge chandelier that's obnoxious and offensive and annoying and somehow we made it work. We've been in *W Magazine* and architecture magazines for the design and we always laugh because it was all this junk that we found because we had no cash.

Was it easier when you opened your second place Le Bremner?

There were things that were easier in terms of the problems you get when you [first enter] the restaurant business. At first, you think [in a Valley Girl voice] 'ooh, what's the menu going to be? What are the

staff going to wear? Get the playlist ready'. And then you realise 'ok, where do we put the garbage?' Or 'how do we deal with recycling?' So, in that sense, we were a lot more prepared.

But it was still a challenge?

When we started making more money [from Garde-Manger], we reinvested in making the restaurant better. Mostly in the kitchen, [on] things that the clients don't necessarily see but that make our jobs a lot easier. And we're pretty hands-on guys so we did all the renovation ourselves again [for Le Bremner]. I know guys that open restaurants that cost them half a million dollars in design and, two weeks later, they're closed because the reality of the business is, you gotta sell a lot of chicken to make a profit. So either you take a cut on the profit margin or you find a way to make it work. For us, that means spending as little as possible and doing as much of the work as possible. It's a passion project.

And what's the concept behind your outlets?

We really keep it unpretentious, easygoing. I encourage my waiters and waitresses to be more personal, to be themselves. If you're a weird personality, then let it shine. It's cool. We make mistakes like everybody else and it's all about fixing those mistakes. If you don't know what you're talking about, then don't pretend. Say 'you know what? Sorry. I'm pretty good with everything else on the menu but this item? Let me get the chef'. People love that stuff – honesty.

What's your take on the whole celebrity chef phenomenon?

There's been such elitism with chefs and food. I'm totally against that. It makes me nervous. Go to any hawker, I mean, I was watching a guy cooking – you know, just the art of 'wokking', if you will, and it's insane. And I was looking at somebody make dumplings and it was fascinating. These guys aren't on TV, they're not celebrity chefs, and look at them – it's pretty real stuff. I get inspired by a thousand people every day.

Is it weird when people who watch *Chuck's Day Off* come especially to see you?

Because of the show, people come [to my restaurants] from all over the world. They want to take a picture, they want an autograph. I'm the same way. I also travel for food. I go to San Francisco for something, I go to New York for something. I go

to Hong Kong to try something. So I understand it, but a lot of the times, it's weird that it's happening to you.

Are you used to the fanfare?

To be on the other side of the story, the restaurant business is not easy. Sometimes, things aren't going as well as we want it to. [Some days] I'm in the juice and people come in and they're expecting the smiley guy. Most of the time, I'm that but if it's that one night, it's hard to snap out of reality and go back to that.

What's the most difficult part?

People who take pictures without asking, or just stare all the time. I mean, I wouldn't walk up to you and snap a picture and walk away. I'd rather meet you and say hi and make it a real, fun meeting. I'm just like anybody else. I'm insecure, I have bad days, I have a pimple... you know what I mean? So I still struggle with that aspect where people don't really think about the person and just see the TV personality. I'm not complaining, 90 percent of the time it's good. But then, TV was something I never dreamt of doing. It kind of just happened...

How exactly?

When we opened, people asked me if I'd like to do a TV show and I kept saying no. At one point, people were asking me so much that I [decided] to call one of my friends and shoot a pilot, see if there's something there. That's how it started and it's been a wild ride. TV is so lasting. We have 52 episodes and it just replays and plays. It's cool but I keep on growing. So, what I did three, four years ago on the show – not that I don't stand by it – but now, I'm on to other things too and it's like...

I wish I did it differently?

Exactly. Now we're doing a show called *Chuck's Week Off*, which is me travelling. But I've opened a new restaurant, I've got a whole bunch of new recipes, I've grown up a little bit, and I'd love to show what I'm doing now. It becomes an addiction in a sense. So, I do want to do *Chuck's Day Off* again, but maybe at my new restaurant.

What are the biggest challenges of cooking in front of a camera?

Cooking and TV are the worst pairing. Food is very real and TV isn't. The worst is working with caramel. [If] the lighting's not right, well, the caramel does not care. The caramel has no business with your lights or your make-up. Somehow it comes together but I really wonder how it even works.

Who do you look up to in the television world?

My ultimate hero is probably Jamie Oliver. There's really nobody that's even close to making it look as easy as this guy does. Even if you look at his first shows, he's still better than everybody else.

And how did it feel to be on *Iron Chef America*?

It's one of those things you can't refuse because it's such an honour to be invited. The competition itself – if you want to honest answer – was life-changing but I'd rather cook in real life. I'd rather be serving clients, making people happy or making 90 percent of the people happy – some people are just never happy [laughs]. The thing is, *Iron Chef* is so real. It's totally the worst hour of your life because you're just trying to make it happen. Was it the best food I've ever put on a plate? No. You have an hour under the worse conditions and you have to make five dishes. For me, cooking professionally is already such a competition. It's hard enough.

And are you happy with how everything turned out for you?

My dream was to open a 40-seat restaurant in Montreal and I never really thought past that. I always say, chopping carrots brought me across the world. I'm pretty lucky. But as much as I travel and meet fans and I do all these great events, the most important thing for me is still to get back and cook. It's what I love to do. It's pretty grounding when you go back home and wash dishes. My two restaurants are my babies. It's where it all started and without that, we wouldn't be here.

Would you open beyond Montreal?

Right now, not really. Just to have two restaurants is a pretty big deal. Maybe Toronto because I think it would really work. But I might have a totally different idea next year.

Finally, you seem big on ink...

This is my new one – durian.

Woah. Where did you get that?

In Singapore. I had durian and really enjoyed it. Most of my tattoos are food. Like lemon meringue pie, bacon, lobster, shrimp, oysters, Wu-Tang – uh, that's not food. There's '275' – the perfect temperature for deep-frying potato chips...

Anything you've had in Hong Kong that you'd like to get tattooed? Pineapple bun maybe?

I already have a pineapple fish that I, um, made up. But so far... maybe a crab of some sort would be good. I'm missing that. You never know. The possibilities are still endless.

Chuck's Day Off airs on the Asian Food Channel, Wed at 9pm.



The reality of the business is you gotta sell a lot of chicken to make a profit

Maureen


RESTAURANT OF THE FORTNIGHT
**HONEST, FAIR
REVIEWS**

 Time Out reviews
anonymously
and pays for
meals.

 Clockwise from left Ham and egg
noodles; Maur's noodle counter;
marinated cherry tomatoes

CALVIN SI


Verdict A sophisticated and
innovative take on Chinese noodles

Chinese noodles, Wan Chai

The city's been on a crazy ramen bend with Japanese noodle bars spreading like wildfire from Lan Kwai Fong to Sham Shui Po. It's a dizzying scene, which is why the opening of Maureen feels like a welcome respite from the tonkotsu saturated market.

Housed behind Wan Chai's famed Blue House heritage building, it's easy to mistake the venue as yet another modern ramen joint, especially with the strip of counter seating flanking the open kitchen. The concept however is built around Chinese-style noodles served in brilliantly rich, slow simmered broth bases. Chef and owner Maureen Loh has ample experience in this field, having operated a cafeteria-style eatery by the name of Soup Café in Central prior to opening this new venture. But while the food at Soup Café was more straight-up and no-fuss Chinese, dishes at Loh's new noodle bar are much more adventurous and sophisticated.

The menu is concise with only

three starters, four noodles and a handful of additional sides. Ingredients are carefully cooked (mostly using sous-vide techniques) to draw out their most intense and organic flavours. Take the peeled cherry tomatoes (\$38) for example, which are marinated for hours on end in a balanced mixture of soy sauce, garlic, shallots and sweetened balsamic vinegar. The plump, red spheres are then lightly dressed in extra virgin olive oil before plating to round off the flavours. It's a complex and refined preparation for such a seemingly simply dish.

But, like we said earlier, it's really the noodles and broths that form the soul of the kitchen. The yellow-hued strands Loh serves are custom-made for the restaurant and are a crossover between heavy, Sichuan dan dan noodles and Guangzhou-style thin noodles. The resulting ribbons are deliciously eggy with a

slight al dente resistance to each bite. These are garnished with finely shredded potatoes and yams (rinsed of excess starch to give more crunch) and a single shiitake mushroom before they're bathed in any two types of soup bases.

Both soups are made from six to eight hours of simmering and boast umami, clean flavours that taste free of MSG and grease. If you order the superior stock spun from sea whelk, Yunnan ham and cartilage-rich cuts of chicken, you'll have an option of lemon olive oil-infused chicken (\$78) or abalone (\$88) on the side. The latter are fresh, Kippin variety molluscs, which are marinated

and braised for more than a day before they're sliced into thin slivers and served with the noodles. Our favourite though is the reinvented egg and ham noodle (\$88), which is served in a full-bodied pork bone, dried scallops and black mushroom broth. You won't get any low-grade

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deli meats here; it's cured Spanish jamón plated with half-boiled, aged huadiao-infused eggs with creamy, molten yolks sprinkled with sea salt and preserved mandarin peel. Delicious.

For the time being, Maureen is only open until 6pm but Loh has plans to expand her menu to be more late-night appropriate. She's playing around with the idea of molecular Chinese tapas. When she does roll these out on to the menu, we'll be eager and ready to give them a try. **Dorothy So**

THE BILL

Marinated cherry tomatoes	\$38
Abalone noodles	\$88
Ham and egg noodles	\$88
10 percent service charge	\$21.4
Total (for two)	\$235.4

Maureen 11 Hing Wan St, Wan Chai, 2915 2261. Mon-Sat 11am-6pm. Closed Sun.

The Faith

★★★★★

Verdict Super-fresh seafood but little else to write home about

Seafood, Tuen Mun

Housed away from the usual cluster of eateries at the Gold Coast shopping mall and hotel, The Faith is one of the few nicer restaurants catering directly to Beaulieu Peninsula residents and their neighbours. It can be easy to miss if you're not familiar with the area. The space encompasses a sparsely decorated bar next to the dining room, and while there's an attempt to create a sophisticated setting (cue candlelight, polished silverware and a well-stocked wine rack), the overall effect smacks more of family friendliness than haute cuisine. Not that there's anything wrong with that. After all, the restaurant is mostly packed with moms and pops with their kids in tow and no-one seems to be complaining.

When it comes to the food, it's best to start at the raw bar. The oyster selection is particularly impressive, and on the night of our visit, seasonal Gillardeau (\$58) and Ancelin (\$58) oysters arrive with plump bellies and briny juices. Don't bother with cocktail sauce – these gems don't ask for anything more than a squeeze of fresh lemon juice. For those who prefer more



Eat your greens Scallop salad at The Faith

minerality on their mollusc, The Faith also carries a splurge-worthy belon (\$138) that's heavy on salt and zinc. Also try the Canadian sea urchin (\$168/five slivers). The slices of fresh cucumber are a nice idea but the bold flavours are a slight overkill. Eat the urchin on its own, or wrap a slice in sheets of nori.

There's also a set dinner menu, which is a steal at \$298 for five courses. It starts with a simple salad with crisp greens drizzled in treacly 10-year balsamic. Ironically, the only complaint we have is with the single sliver of Hokkaido scallop that tastes bland and wholly unnecessary. Next up, mussels cooked in white wine sauce are fragrant and delicious, despite being on the small side. The same can't be said for the mushroom

cream soup, which is redolent with truffle oil but thin on flavour. Still, the most disappointing are the mains – a choice between pork rack, Australian steak or Norwegian salmon with dill sauce. All three are plated lukewarm and thoroughly underseasoned. The only saving graces are the scalloped potatoes and ratatouille that hold up the fish and meat.

The Faith is a great venue for fresh seafood, but not too much else. And if you don't live in the general vicinity, the food doesn't really justify the journey. **Dorothy So**

The Faith UG/F, 87 Beaulieu Peninsula, Tuen Mun, 2451 2099. Daily noon-midnight. Dinner for two: around \$1,200.

Soon Yi Tuna Sushi

★★★★★

Verdict Tuna everywhere but not a bite worth eating

Japanese, Tsim Sha Tsui

In an age where ordering tuna can eat away at the conscience of many a foodie, perhaps a restaurant specialising in the mighty fish may seem a little regressive. But Soon Yi Tuna Sushi, a popular Taiwanese chain that has just opened its first branch in Hong Kong, isn't that naïve. It buffs up its eco-credentials to placate nervous diners and keeps prices dirt cheap to entice the rest.

They claim to serve only yellowfin tuna, which at least according to the Marine Conservation Society is currently at sustainable levels. Secondly, an illustration on each placemat depicts their choice of longline fishing; while not without its setbacks, it's one of the less damaging fishing methods used today. They say their fish is also 'super fresh', thanks to their 'super frozen' technology where the freshly caught bounty is immediately zapped to -60°C to preserve its quality. All very commendable, and if there were any flair or flavour to



Terrible tuna Soon Yi is less than inspiring

the food itself, perhaps Soon Yi would have earned more stars.

Straight off, we'll say that most of the rating is earned by the service, which is warm and eager to please. Our waiter explained the menu with such enthusiasm that we felt sorry he had to peddle such poor-quality fare. The best is the off-menu grilled tuna jaw (\$32 per piece), which has us digging at the smoky little nuggets of flesh. On the other hand, a set menu for two (\$288) features a weak and one-dimensional tuna miso soup, pedestrian tuna handrolls (points for ultra-crisp nori), tuna sashimi (o-toro, chu-toro, akami) and a selection of so-so

sushi, which includes a grapefruit juice marinated tuna gunkan maki.

The o-toro is more chew than melt-in-the-mouth, the akami ice-cold. Both, miraculously, manage to taste of very little and, in the nigiri, come very thinly sliced. For a restaurant that does little else apart from tuna, it comes as a rude shock to discover that even the basics are so poorly executed. **Charmaine Mok**

Soon Yi Tuna Sushi 1/F, Long Wah Bldg, 21 Lock Rd, Tsim Sha Tsui, 2721 1665. Daily 11am-11pm. Dinner for two: around \$400.

* Snack attack Stephen James Luxury Organics

Food & Drink



It's all about snack bars these days when it comes to healthy eating on the go. And, attacking the snack market in a revitalising way, Hong Kong's Stephen James Luxury Organics have developed a line of 100 percent natural nibbles that are chock full of nutrients and minerals. The snack bars are food for the brain and body – and, we can testify, tasty at that.

The founders of the brand, Stephen and James Costella, are tied together not only as brothers but also through similar interests. After two decades of practising dentistry, they were so intrigued by food and its effects on people's lifestyles and health, they decided to explore further. Using old school technology, they found a way to treat food while keeping the most natural and beneficial chemicals alive.

The brothers' product line consists of snack bars (all \$39) that are made with all-natural, good-for-you ingredients. Each bar takes three days to make – and by hand, no less. These on-the-go treats range in flavour from the sweet Berry and Choco bars that have a nutty, thick and chewy texture, to the savoury Tokyo and Pizza bars which are more crunchy with a similar grain-like taste. They also make salts (\$88/365g) and volcanic pilli nuts (\$38/34g), which will soon be launched with a sweet version coated in their new sweetener Carazuc. As James explains, Carazuc is all-natural stuff that is 'cut from a flower of a coconut tree and drips all night into a container'. It has a very low GI (the measure of the effects of carbohydrates in food on blood sugar levels) and it's low in calories. It has a tasty, caramel flavour and is high in potassium and phosphorus. In other words, it's good for you in every way.

Recognising the importance of substituting those late night junk food cravings, Stephen James are continuing to develop products for health-conscious customers so they can still indulge – but remain healthy too. So get snacking! **Louise Choi**

Stephen James Luxury Organics available at Great and ThreeSixty. Customer inquiries: 2522 1095; www.sjluxury.com.

This fortnight's food news...

* That sinking feeling

In a slightly macabre but enticing offer, Hullet House is recreating the predictably extravagant 10-course menu served during RMS Titanic's first and only voyage 100 years ago. The feast is the special creation of chef Philippe Orrico and is served exclusively at the JP Hennessy room at **St George restaurant**. The menu includes oysters, consommé Olga with scallops and English cucumbers, poached salmon, English lamb served with mint sauce and roasted squab and cress. The team has also sourced the ship's original champagne, Heidsieck Monopole Gout Americain vintage 1907 – a rare bottle that was raised from the depths of the ocean in 1998. The champagne will be served at the invitation-only launch dinner on April 14. If you miss the launch, the Titanic menu continues to run through April and May and is priced at a cool \$3,800 per person, inclusive of wine pairings. *Hullett House, 1881 Heritage, 2A Canton Rd, Tsim Sha Tsui, 3988 0220.*

* Mom pays a visit

It's a family affair at **JW's California** with chef Jordi Villegas teaming up with his madre Elvira Serra for a special dinner feast. This will be

Serra's second time guest cheffing at JW's and the mom-and-son menu features five sumptuous courses, including Galician tuna belly cake, assorted tapas and crispy suckling pig. The menu is available for one evening only on Friday April 6 and is priced from \$788 per person. *5/F, JW Marriott, 88 Queensway, Admiralty, 2810 8366.*

* Great eggs-pectations

Roll on the puns: **DiVino** launches a new egggressively egg-based 'eggstreme brunch' from Saturday midday to 3pm. Try breakfast items such as eggs benedict, eggs Norwegian and truffle scrambled eggs toast (right), all priced at \$98. You can also enjoy top-of-the-morning cocktails and relaxing trance tunes spun by DiVino's resident DJ. Sounds eggscellent. *73 Wyndham St, Central, 2167 8883; www.divino.com.hk.*

* Cue the kaiseki

Inagiku at The Royal Garden introduces a kaiseki lunch and

dinner menu to celebrate the fine art of Japanese dining. The menus include season-driven dishes such as flounder and striped jack sashimi, golden snapper soup and simmered sea eel and bamboo shoots for spring. The lunch menu is priced at \$688 per person, while dinner clocks in at \$1,580 or \$1,880 with sake pairings. *1/F, The Royal Garden, 69 Mody Rd, Tsim Sha Tsui, 2733 2933.*

* Beefy affair

Throughout the month of April, **Edo & Bibo** offers a promotional price on its premium beef platter. The meaty offering showcases five parts of the cattle cooked in five different ways, including Australian wagyu beef cheek, beef bone marrow cooked in broth, ribs with mushrooms and sea salt, oxtail in red wine and USDA certified prime striploin. It's an awesome offer at \$588 per platter. *28/F, Macau Yat Yuen Ctr, 525 Hennessy Rd, Causeway Bay, 3421 0472.*



* Belgian fest

Great Food Hall at Pacific Place stocks a smorgasbord of Belgian delicacies from now until April 12. You'll find waffles, speculaas biscuits, endives, chocolates and, of course, beer. The Belgian food festival coincides nicely with Easter, so also expect to find plenty of choco bunnies hopping about. *B/F, Two Pacific Place, 88 Queensway, Admiralty, 2918 9986; www.greatfoodhall.com.*

* Drink by the numbers

Feeling blue from April showers? Pop into **208 Duecento Otto** and treat yourself to a yummy and affordable spring deal. Throughout April, customers can enjoy their gamberi and zucchini frita with two glasses of prosecco for only \$208. The offer is available at 208's bar area from 6pm every evening. *208 Hollywood Rd, Sheung Wan, 2549 0208; www.208.com.hk.*

* Food court fancy

Cityplaza's fancy cafeteria **Food Republic** reopens after a culinary facelift. A host of new vendors have joined the food court, including Japanese ramen joint Toriyumon Express, Dong's Taiwanese Beef Noodle and Sing Lum Khui, which

Temptation

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offers Yunnan-style vermicelli. In celebration of the opening, some food stalls will offer special set menus exclusively for the occasion. Now where to begin eating? Shop 308, Cityplaza I, 18 Taikoo Shing Rd, Tai Koo, 2907 0521.

*** Local pride**

Starbucks joins forces with G.O.D. and Hong Kong artist Stanley Wong (aka another mountainman) in a bi-level venue that celebrates the local arts scene and film industry. Aside from brewing coffees and frappuccinos, the 'Hong Kong Proud' concept store is also equipped with a mini theatre for regular movie seminars and exhibitions organised in conjunction with the Hong Kong Film Archive. 1/F-2/F, Wai Kee House, 89-91 Sai Yee St, Mong Kok, 2789 8710.

*** Spanish Sunday**

Tapas Bar at the Kowloon Shang rolls out an international tapas brunch. The menu includes oysters, sushi, sliced Iberico and Serrano ham, and plenty of salads, cheeses and sides. Also available are a choice of mains such as Boston lobster and paella. The brunch is available every Sunday from 11am to 3pm and is priced at HK\$398 per person. Wine packages are available for an additional \$150 to \$280. L/F, Kowloon Shangri-La, 64 Mody Rd, Tsim Sha Tsui, 2733 8756.



Art of dining Inagiku does kaiseki

Hong Kong's best...Easter eats

Food & Drink

1 Café on M

Café on M offers a family friendly Easter lunch buffet from April 6 to April 9. Priced at \$428 for adults and \$288 for children, the feast includes an extensive dessert selection as well as egg painting and balloon-twisting demos. On Sunday 8, kids can drop by for the buffet before joining pastry chef Kevin Chiu for a cookie and chocolate making class (\$488) from 3pm to 5pm. Reservations essential for the class. M/F, InterContinental Grand Stanford, 70 Mody Rd, Tsim Sha Tsui East, 2731 2860.

2 Papi

This Italian cichetti restaurant plates up an Easter feast with a heavy dose of cocoa. Available from April 2 to April 9, Papi's chocolate-inspired menu includes braised wild boar with sweet onion and dark chocolate sauce (\$300), and Gianduja hazelnut chocolate and banana pizza (\$88). Sweet sips are also available, ranging from dark chocolate martinis to the blissful Raspberry Kiss cocktail made from white chocolate, tequila, Chambord and crème de cacao. Shop R011, Civic Square, 3/F, Elements Mall, 1 Austin Rd, West Kowloon, 2811 2681; www.papi-hk.com.

3 The Fleming

Turn Easter into a mini holiday with The Fleming's family offer from April 1 to April 8. The offer is priced at \$1,900 per night and includes American breakfast for three, a happy hour wine reception, chocolate gift and free tickets to Ocean Park for mum, dad and the little 'un. Early bird bookings must be made at least 10 days in advance. If you don't want to spend the night, go for The Fleming's four-course Easter set lunch and dinner menu (\$248), which is available at the restaurant Cubix from April 2 to April 9. 41 Fleming Rd, Wan Chai, 3607 2288; www.thefleming.com.hk.

4 Top Deck

Enjoy a leisurely brunch atop the Jumbo floating restaurant. Top Deck's Easter buffet menu is available from April 6 to April 9 from 11am to 4pm and includes an array of international delicacies from sushi to Thai salads. The spread is priced at \$428 for adults and \$168 for children, inclusive of free-flow wine (for grown-ups), sodas and juices. A children's Easter egg hunt will also be hosted on Monday 9. Rooftop, Jumbo Kingdom, Shum Wan Pier Drive, Wong Chuk Hang, Aberdeen, 2552 3331.

Time Out

Lazy, Relax, Un-expected, Sunday

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BAR OF THE FORTNIGHT

Sweet bouquet The Nose is a great place for adventurous drinkers

The Nose Wine School

★★★★★

Verdict The bar scores high for its originality and boutique wines

We'd like to think we have a nose for wine. And now Hong Kong has a nose for the grape too. Literally. The city has a new wine bar called The Nose – and we're impressed. The tasting room is a new addition to Hong Kong's The Nose Wine School and, by all appearances, seems to be a fantastic venture with plenty of charm.

When we arrive at this hidden gem, we're warmly greeted by Stefano Yim, owner and sommelier of The Nose Wine School and The Nose Wine Bar Inc in Pasadena, California. He puts us at ease and we check out the venue. The bar has an open bistro feel to it with light jazzy sounds filling the room and a friendly, warm and comfortable atmosphere.

Within a few minutes of taking our seats, we're already impressed with the vibe and ready to get down to business. To our surprise, though, we don't get given a wine list. We're puzzled. But what comes next impresses us much more. Yim informs us there are only two open bottles to choose from and, with a vigour not often seen in Hong Kong bars, he starts going into the history of the two tipples. We love

Yim's passion so we opt for these bottles, starting with Luigi Giusti – Castella – Italy, a tiny appellation of Morro d'Alba that uses 100 percent Verdicchio grapes. It boasts tropical fruit aromas, a crispy and refreshing texture and flavours of pineapple and melon mingling through the finish to make this wine a perfect summer sipper.

Essentially, The Nose differs from other tasting bars simply because of Yim's passion and interest in boutique bottles and wineries. Of course, the space carries the usual suspects but it's the smaller batch wines that make this venue such a great place for the truly adventurous. Try the open bottles or let the staff take you into the wine cellar so you can choose your own poison. Some of the favourites here are the Domaine du Moulie 1990, Domaine Sergent 2009, Fucci Titolo 2008 and Barbaresco Bruno Giacosa 1999.

From the cellar, we try the Domaine Roche Buisserie Gaia 2007 Rhone, 90 percent Syrah and 10 percent Grenache. This particular wine is a unique taste for us as it is biodynamically grown. What this means is that it's been

holistically developed and maintains interrelationships between the soil, plants and animals in a self-sustaining system. The wine is fruity and has a silky texture. It's a definite must-try.

We also ask the experts to select an assortment of cheeses to go along with our wines – and these don't disappoint. We try the cheddar, camembert, tomme d'abondance, saint neaire and morbier. Our one complaint would be that, although they are the perfect match to the wines, the presentation leaves something to be desired, with nothing to dress the plate except what appears to be bread from the grocery store cut into squares.

The Nose Wine School is a must for everyone starting out on wine tastings or those who want to break away from the norm. Come adventurous and you won't be disappointed. **James Sibley**

“
The Nose differs from other tasting bars simply because of the owner's passion

The Nose Wine School

3/F, 51 Sharp St East, Causeway Bay, 2892 0116.

timeout.com.hk/restaurants

Bar news and events...

* Let it Rayne

Rayne Bar and Global Wine Cellar join forces to promote a range of tipples from Australia's award-winning RockBare Winemakers. The bar has introduced three RockBare wines by the glass, including the Mojo 'FIZZ' sparkling wine and Mojo shiraz. Guests can also look forward to parties and promos that will shine the spotlight on this fine selection. 43-55 Wyndham St, Central, 2840 1955; www.rayne.com.hk.

* God Save the Queen

This year marks the 60th anniversary of her Majesty the Queen's ascent to the British throne. Scotch whisky distillers John Walker & Sons celebrate this occasion in high spirits with the bottling of the **Diamond Jubilee** – a blend of rare malt and grain whiskies distilled in 1952, the very year the Queen acceded to the throne. Available from Diageo, the bottle makes a fine addition to any collector's stash – but at 100,000 quid, it's best to save up. 15/F, Dorset House, Taikoo Place, 979 King's Rd, Quarry Bay, 2976 1888.

* Stop the spinning

Is your head still hurting from the Sevens? Then stock up on **Noho** – a hangover remedy that's just landed in Hong Kong. Toss one back before you drink and let the 'natural ingredients' like ginger root and prickly pear do their 'pre-plenishing' job. If celebrities Snooki and Paris Hilton drink it (and they do), it can't be bad, right? Noho is available at major bars and pubs in Central and Wan Chai. www.nohodrink.com.hk.

* TST temptations

Cucina revamps its TST (Thursday, Saturday, Tuesday) promo series. Drop by on Thursday evenings and enjoy eight different wines for \$188. Otherwise, come for buy-one-get-one-bottle-free prosecco Saturday nights or sample rum cocktails on Tuesday. The deals are available from April to June. 6/F, Marco Polo Hotel, 17 Canton Rd, Tsim Sha Tsui, 2113 0808; www.cucinahk.com.

* Sweet deal

Kick back with **Sugar's** Sundowners offer. The promo is available from Monday to Friday, 5pm to 7pm, and includes specially priced cocktails, wines and beers complemented by chill-out tunes. 32/F, East, 29 Taikoo Shing Rd, Taikoo, 3968 3738.

* Wine walk!

Don't forget to book your early bird tickets for **Time Out Wine Walk** on April 28. Visit www.timeout.com.hk/winewalk for details



VERA KWOK

Uncorked Believe in the bottle Alasdair Nicol gets evangelical about why Christianity endorses drinking

When I was 15 years old, I undertook my confirmation as a member of the Church of England. The wine they had in communion was the only legal alcohol I was allowed at the time and I remember that it tasted nothing like the vintage I'd been swigging illegally the previous Saturday night – a bottle of the cheapest Lambrusco I could find in the local town's off-licence. And while I'm not a particularly religious person (not voluntarily, anyway), I have to confess that I've always seen an intriguing relationship between wine and the Christian faith.

I was reminded of this connection recently when I came across a bouquet called Godsend – a divine California cabernet from Leal Vineyards that got me thinking about how the most religious people in history have shaped the way we drink. Monks founded and maintained many of the plots of land in Burgundy, including Domaine de la Romanée-Conti – which nowadays is the origin of one of the most sought-after and expensive reds money can buy. The same rings true for the region of Priorat in Spain – arguably the second most favourable grape-producing region in the country – named so after the priory that was founded there by wine-making monks in the 12th century. And then there's Dom Pérignon, the Benedictine monk who allegedly founded champagne (he didn't but the story is a marketer's dream). There is a still wildly popular wine named after him to this day.

Of course, we all remember how, in the Bible, Jesus turned water

into wine for a party – a feat I have always wished I could replicate. And maybe this is why there are so many religious references in the alcohol market. Angels and Sinners, a beatific chardonnay from California, is one prime example, an addictive tippie that's perfect as a party wine. Perhaps the makers of this wine took inspiration from the Bible story. The wickedly named 7 Deadly Zins, on the other hand, is a funky little zinfandel from California and, seriously, when paired with a bit of char siu pork, is a delight to drink. Yes, gluttony does prevail when it comes to this bottle. And while we're moving into the realm of sin, I am reminded of the famous Chilean wine Casillero del Diablo. In order to keep thieves away from his grapes, the winery's owner Don Melchor de Concha y Toro, spread the rumour that the devil lived in his cellar and thus 'The Devil's Cellar' name began.

I'm glad to report I haven't come across any Lucifer shiraz or Judas barberello – and I doubt I ever will. But I will observe the long religious history of wine and the way it's evolved to become the product we now love and cherish. After all, there must be a good reason why wine is still the only alcohol allowed in church. It reminds me of the quote by Benjamin Franklin: "Wine is proof that God loves us and loves to see us happy." Amen.

Godsend, Angels and Sinners and 7 Deadly Zins are available from J & M Bros Winery Ltd. www.jmwinery.com; 2420 0309.



NEW FORM OF LIFESTYLE EXPERIENCE

Pacific Coffee and Essentials Salon jointly present CafeSalon, an entirely new concept store that has now been inaugurated on Wellington Street, Central. This cross-over concept signifies "Innovation", "Creativity", "Vitality" and "Fashion" aim at providing a better lifestyle enjoyment to the new generation.

CafeSalon

PACIFIC COFFEE **essentials** TONIGHT




2 for 1 or
free upgrade
(for all drinks only)

+


\$100 off

Present this coupon to enjoy the following offers:

1. receive a complimentary handcrafted beverage of the same or lower value with any take-away beverage purchased (excluding promotional drinks, bottled drinks, juices, Chillin' & alcoholic drinks)
 2. enjoy \$100 discount offer for any technical or hair cut services (except blow dry styling service) Booking number: 2254 6088
- This offer is applicable only to CafeSalon at G/F, 86 Wellington Street, Hong Kong
 - This offer is valid until April 30, 2012 and not applicable to delivery services
 - This offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other promotions or privileges (except bring-your-own-mug offer on the purchased beverage)
 - Photocopies or electronic format of the coupon are accepted. To minimize paper wastage, coupons are reusable
 - Purchased or redeemed item is not refundable and maximum of 3 handcrafted beverages can be redeemed at one time
 - CafeSalon reserves the right of final decision in case of disputes

86 Wellington Street, Hong Kong