

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16

Le Marron, Hong Kong

Time for “Love it. Wanna keep it a secret!” post.

Our family friend Auntie Jo took us for dinner at Le Marron at Causeway Bay. Inside, the restaurant looks like a brasserie salon, replete with mini rooms and lace partitions. Understandably, the décor was Camembert-cheesy and lacy screens provide little shield against noisy nosy diners but otherwise, I felt light years away from the hustle and bustle of Causeway Bay. From beginning to end, service was crisp, casual and friendly.

The single-paged menu is basically divided into 5 sections- starters, seafood, soups, main course and dessert and spotted a bevy of dishes that stroked my Francophilia tendencies. No kidding. A top-down scan of the menu only served to made me even more indecisive. I veered from desserts to starters to main course and back, each time none the wiser because everything just screamed, “you wanna a piece of me?”. Even after my order was taken, I was plagued with “should I have ordered ___ instead?” doubts.

Instead of disturbing the waiter, I decided to busy myself with the bread basket, served with butter, pate and tuna. Oh yeah, nothing quite like warm crusty bread rolls to distract me from the more important things in life.



If nothing floats your Chinese junk ship more than warm bowl of soup on a chilly winter’s evening, you might want to give their French onion soup and mushroom soup a try.

For starters, we had salad, snails, frogs' legs and fatty liver. With the exception of the salad and had it not been for the fact that we were in a French restaurant, it sure sounds like Macbeth's witches were moonlighting guest chefs. Phew!



The not-so-french California Salad, which came with chicken, bacon, eggs, cheese, crouton among the mesclun mix, was dependable but it was the snails, frogs and liver which hoarded the limelight.

What do you mean you have ran out of newts and blind worms?

The escargot, soaked in parsley butter, had been baked on a bed of roughly chopped po-tay-po-tah-toes; the frog legs were sauteed with generous dollop of garlic herb butter while the pan fried foie gras heart achingly soft, it decadence mellowed by the tangy wild berries compote.



The kitchen seems to have a penchant for excessive butter and olive oil but that's what bread baskets are for, honey!

For our main courses, my mum and Auntie Jo went for the pan fried Kurobuta pork, while my sister zoomed in on the halibut and I opted for the baked lamb chop.



The kurobuta pork was an eye-opener. It's amazing how you think you found the tenderest piece of pork chop, and then something else comes along, shocks your system and makes you question what have you been raving about all along. I took a bite and subconsciously declared, "this ain't pork, this is.. is.. chicken thigh!" Flavour-wise, one could count on a drizzle of porcini gravy to jazz up still-can't-believe-it's-kurobuta.



My sister had the roasted tapenade-crusted Atlantic halibut with wild mushroom ragout and beet jus, which she polished off with little ease. That's saying something for my sister who usually won't participate in any fishy business unless it absolutely devoid of well, fishiness.



For my main course, I usually always go for red meat. I felt as though I was caught between the two loves of my life- duck confit and wagyu beef cheeks. Unable to make a decision, I browsed through the rest of the menu, in search of something new to try. The risotto with truffles and seared balsamic and honey pigeon sounded promising enough but wasn't enough to pique my curiosity. Faced with difficult choices, I went for the unusual suspect -baked lamp chops- but was immediately with dread as soon as my order was taken.

“Oh dear, I should have order the wagyu beef cheek... it’s been 5 minutes since my order was taken, wonder if I can change it to the duck confit, or not wait, the pigeon”

Alas the baked lamb chops were disturbingly good. I have never had lamb chops served shaped like hearty drumsticks, much less rubbed with wild mushroom puree and wrapped in thin puff pastry that tore away to reveal love-me-tender insides. It was more than just love at first bite, it was my ‘Hallelujah’ moment.

I’m definitely feeling Christmas spirit this year and it’s not just because of dessert. Somehow the kitschy overplayed Christmas carols and mechanical Santas, reindeers and snowmen seem to have effected my emo side.



Typical me eyed the dessert menu even before I had decided on my starter and main course. Admittedly the main courses were a tough act to follow up on, however this doesn’t mean you should forgo dessert under ANY circumstances because Le Marron dishes out some neat desserts



The crepes suzette, served with vanilla ice cream was very French, very 'Mademoiselle would like seconds!' The folds of crepe, all sponged up with citrus delight, resembled wrapping paper I couldn't wait to tear away. Paired with vanilla ice cream, it was as if Christmas had arrived early.



The Grand Marnier soufflé performed beautifully. Every bite melted away like falling snowflakes on a chilly winter night.

It was definitely no 'Silent Night' as we tucked into baked banana with vanilla ice cream and toffee sauce. As I relished every bite in a state of half-trance, a vision of

Nigella Lawson popped into my mind (it gets a little biblical here): the domestic goddess herself scrapping clean the plate, dishing out salacious noises while she's at it.



No Michelin stars, no celebrity chefs, not exactly the watering hole for the who's-who from Hong Kong Tatler scene but that's what I like about Le Marron. A hidden gem tucked away Indiana-Jones-style on the 12th floor of Ying Kong Mansion (so there! I've revealed the secret location), Le Marron is undoubtedly one of my favorite restaurants in Hong Kong.