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Room Eighteen focuses on fine modern Hong Kong cuisine

By YIP YOKE TENG

IF YOU are tempted by the fine noodles and porridge that one gets in Hong Kong, teased by the flavourful soup oozing from the Shanghai dumpling Xiao Long Bao or thrilled by the many new Chinese culinary inventions, the Tai Thong group has something in store for you.

Room Eighteen, one of the group's latest ventures, treats diners to Chinese offerings with an emphasis on fine modern Hong Kong cuisine. Its outlets are located at Berjaya Times Square, Tropicana City Mall and Mid Valley shopping centre.

"Hong Kong has made a mark for itself not just with a variety of delicacies, but also with the staple noodles and porridge that has achieved very high culinary standards. On top of that, the BBQ items from Hong Kong have earned the thumbs-up from people all over the world," senior restaurant manager Tan Chia Hong said.



Simple and spacious: Room Eighteen Restaurant at Berjaya Time Square, KL.

"These delights are brought together under one roof and served in the refinement our outlets are known for, without burning a hole in diners' pockets. To enhance the array, there is also a selection of our perennial favourites such as Bak Kut Teh and Thai-style noodles.

"The array also reflects the name of our restaurant as 'Eighteen', in Cantonese, sounds like 'collecting treasures'," he added.

Diners can expect an innovative twist to the dishes that incorporate time-honoured goodness. The Xiao Long Bao, for example, has a rich, clear herbal soup for an extra ounce of nutrition.

That is the work of 28-year-old chef Louis Liu from Guangdong province in China, who heads the Dim Sum section. Chef Lau Wan Kwong, 46, from Hong Kong, is in charge of the BBQ section while chef Chai Tuck Cheong, 35, from Perak helms the main kitchen.

"The idea of adding herbal ingredients in the Xiao Long Bao struck me when I discovered that Malaysians have a penchant for herbal soups. I thought, why not just add it into the famous Shanghainese dumplings?" said Liu.

The chef likes experimenting with different ingredients to invent new delights, but that involves a lot of trials and tribulations as it is not just about being creative.

"One needs to have a good foundation in the traditional recipes and all relevant culinary skills before they can be creative. Even so, it takes patience to create something with the perfect flavour. The sad thing is, nowadays, many young cooks just want to climb up the career ladder without really paying attention to the foundation," he said.



Roast delights: BBQ Three Combination, comprising (from left) BBQ pork, roast goose and roast pork.

He added that this trend, however, did not occur in China, a country teeming with culinary masters who could tell right away if a young chef had the skills and sincerity.

His other offerings are Green Onion Pie, World's No: 1 Baked Bun, Deep Fried Papaya Custard Puff and Spicy Tofu Skin Roll that tempt with their appetising aroma, dainty texture and balanced flavours.

The BBQ Three Combination, consisting of BBQ pork, roast pork and roast goose, is undoubtedly Lau's pride.

"It is actually easy to learn how to make these BBQ delicacies but it is difficult to excel. A master may impart all his knowledge but it really depends on whether the student can grasp how to control the timing and technique," he explained.

Firm, succulent meat in a sweet, crispy and slightly smokey coat is required of BBQ pork while roast pork has to have delicately crunchy skin, thin layers of melt-in-the-mouth fat and tender, flavourful meat thrice the thickness of the fat — these are the most important criteria and Lau's creations certainly meet these requirements.

Seafood Congee with Meat Ball and Century Egg and Fresh Prawn Wanton with Noodles in Hot Soup are some options to savour among the Chinese staples. The congee is smooth and the sweet with the flavour of the ingredients, in spite of a more runny texture, while the noodles are fine and springy.

The Thai Style Hot and Sour Noodle Soup will be a surprise, especially if you are looking for something tangy. It appears to be a bowl of noodles in clear soup, but do not be deceived: it is hot and sour, to the right degree.

Round off the meal with one of the desserts. Try not miss the other Hong Kong favourite — sweetened sago — served with a choice of mango or watermelon and aloe vera.

The 18th day of every month will be the best day to make a trip of Room Eighteen as a la carte dishes are served from as low as RM1.80 that day.

ROOM EIGHTEEN, LG 50 & LG 18C, Lower Ground Floor, Berjaya Times Square, Kuala Lumpur (Tel: 03-2148 8688). Business hours: 11am to 9.45pm, daily. Non-halal.

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