

The French Window

Birdie Golf, HK Golfer's undercover critic of all things food and wine, visits IFC Mall's latest European offering and comes away impressed



After another forgettable performance at my home club, Discovery Bay, it was time to turn my attention to the venue for the evening's festivities – **The French Window** on the third floor of IFC Mall, a mere hop, skip and a jump from the Central Ferry Pier. Leaving my bag at the club but battle weary from my on-course misdemeanours, I was in much need of gastronomic delight. Would this spanking new offering fit the bill?

Celebrity chef Justin Quek is leading something of an invasion on Hong Kong's culinary scene. After Whisk in The Mira Hong Kong, the Singaporean has undertaken the role of dining consultant at The French Window, thereby adding significant weight behind The Miramar Group's growing restaurant portfolio, who own both outlets.

Surprisingly, when we arrived the restaurant wasn't even half full, which was undoubtedly how we were able to secure a reservation on just the restaurant's second day of business. My partner and I are always a bit cautious about trying a new place so early on in its gestation but, I reckoned, Chef Quek should be familiar with the local market by now. Was I right?

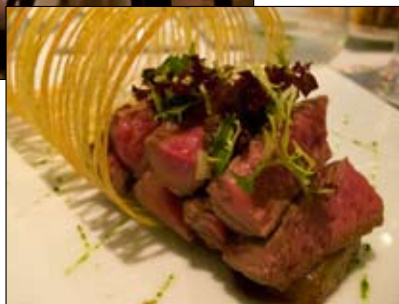
Entering the restaurant is like walking into a maze. Long corridors take you past

the impressively-stocked wine fridges which finally lead you to the main dining area. The modern yet sophisticated décor is highlighted by wrought iron and textured glass details, with our table enjoying spectacular views of Victoria Harbour through large double-height floor-to-ceiling windows.

There are two set menus, the eight-course Gourmet (HK\$1,280) and the five-course Dégustation (HK\$780). My partner and I went for the latter. Naturally, there's also à la carte, which includes almost everything in the set menus. HK\$600 extra adds wine paired with all the courses, but we bought our own – a 1996 Les Forts de Latour, which, I have to say, is drinking really well right now. A very smooth full-bodied wine with great balance, the vintage still has many more years of enjoyment left for those who prefer

to wait. Corkage was HK\$350, but this is waived if in addition you order a bottle from their extensive wine list.

Now to the food. The amuse-bouche was the largest portion that we had ever had. The cep mushroom soup was like a course on its own... very good, but perhaps a bit too much to start. The Dégustation started with the Angus super prime beef tartare, which was good, but we still prefer it presented in the old fashioned way where the waiter prepares it in front of you. The grilled scallop with cep mushroom was perfect, very fresh and juicy. Too bad there was just one...but



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it's hard to grumble as this was a tasting menu after all. The pot au feu with foie gras and black truffle was very tasty, with the foie gras pan seared to perfection – crispy on the outside and just right inside, not overdone nor too raw. When the pan seared lamb came, we dropped our jaws in awe of the presentation. The potatoes were cut into very thin strips, wrapped cylindrically and deep fried. The result, a hollow wire tube made of potatoes – almost like a stretched out Slinky toy. The lamb was very tender although the end cut was slightly over cooked.

Dessert was not quite as stunning however. The sampler included an almond cream, a chocolate biscotti and a modern version of tutti frutti, which tasted rather bland and was a little disappointing given what came before. On reflection, we really should have tried the tarte tartin from the à la carte menu.

Overall though, the experience was excellent, and despite being open for only two days, things went relatively smoothly. The waiters were maybe a little too attentive at times as they announced in between every course that they were changing the cutlery for the next dish; we thought they should have introduced the dish when it arrived so that you could actually see what was being presented. But this is a minor point. Chef Quek's cuisine never disappoints and under Head Chef Mickael Le Calvez, The French Window is no exception. **Score: 17/20**