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Chef Luigi Stinga's Mandarin Oriental KL Debut Is An Ode To His Italian Childhood



His English may not be his strong suit yet, but the boyish grin and Italian friendliness emanating from Chef Luigi Stinga is infectious, coming through in the dishes he'd prepared for us. Described as somewhat of a superstar on Mandarin Oriental KL's team, his repertoire is sealed as a past protégé to Italian gastronomic whizzes like chef Antonio Guida, and at Michelin-starred restaurants including Seta, Restaurant Quattro Passi and Restaurant Piazza Duomo. He's rather shy about that luminous background, but brims with excitement his first stint in Southeast Asia at Mandarin Grill KL.



A self-confessed meat 'whisperer,' chef Luigi decided to show us a more intimate side with a fish-themed menu. He's also had some time to tinker with local spices and flavours with his kitchen crew, which subtly informs the classic Italian dishes he's introducing. "My menu is so different from what I'm used to: There's cumin and aniseed, whereas before I use lots of fresh basil and oregano," he let on. Each dish held a complexity of flavour to it, which chef Luigi elaborated further with personal anecdotes. Here's what we tried:

First course: Varirione Di Funghi



Photo credit: Khairul Imran / Malaysia Tatle

Creamy, silky and piquantly umami, this dish of mushrooms contained 6 types, cooked differently to bring out their fullest flavour. Skillfully executed to keep them from overpowering each other, the puree was mellowed with just a dash of cream. “It’s a complicated dish; some mushrooms are more strong, some more acidic, and were selected base on how they balance out each other,” Chef Luigi revealed.

Second: Patate E Prosecco



Photo credit: Khairul Imran / Malaysia Tatler

With its edible-garden plating, this one’s for the fancy palates. A delicate square of potato whipped with chives and a dash of prosecco were a contrast of comfort and luxury, coupled with a topping of caviar grains, which was then surrounded by a foamy pool, for a play on texture.

Third: Ravioli Di Baccala



Photo credit: Khairul Imran / Malaysia Tatler

We moved on to heavier dishes, first with an exquisite trio of ravioli dumplings. Plated like a painting with colourful strokes of savoury potato and oregano reduction, each handmade ravioli encased dried salted cod fish aged 4 days before. The dish with the longest kitchen prep time, it also holds a very dear place in chef Luigi's heart, with nostalgic flavours and aromas conjured from his boyhood. As I marvelled and savoured crisp raviolis skin and the silken flakes of cod, chef Luigi relayed with a smile, those mornings he woke up to the mouthwatering fragrance of this dish wafting from the kitchen.

Fourth: Risotto Alla Parmiggiana



Photo credit: Khairul Imran / Malaysia Tatler

Similarly to that fond memory of ravioli was this a soul-satisfying dish of risotto. “I love parmiggiana,” confessed chef Luigi. “So I wanted to infuse that taste into a risotto, and I love the taste of parmesan stirred through.” The result of this vibrant, creamy carb enveloped in a halo of tomato crème and earthiness of eggplant, endowed mouthfuls of 'hygge' sensations; each bite of al-dente grain beautifully retained a cheesy pleasure.

Fifth: Pesce Del Giorno All ' Acqua Pazza



Photo credit: Khairul Imran / Malaysia Tatler

The last of our mains showcased the down-to-earth simplicity of fresh produce – a philosophy valued by chef Luigi that also aligns with Mandarin Oriental KL. Fish of the day was grilled to a browned smokiness and paired with a tomato au jus, local greens, and a crispbread of olive and micro green toppings: light but pleasing.

Dessert: Tiramisu



Photo credit: Khairul Imran / Malaysia Tatler

In place of the usual no-frills layered tiramisu, an elaborate dessert was set down, a deconstructed, garden-inspired presentation crafted to be devoured by the eyes too. Joining peaks of mascarpone were sheets of shredded sponge cake, embellished with cocoa-coffee crumble to heighten the anticipated sugar rush.

FINAL NOTES

Seeing as how chef Luigi picked up influence from the wealth of easternised ingredients and domestic produce, the curated dinner intentionally evokes the lightness of summer and a preservation of his roots. Chef Luigi isn't out to defy convention or give in to local preferences — the proud Italian wants to introduce the real identity of Italian food.

These and more of chef Luigi Stinga's dishes are available at Mandarin Grill, Mandarin Oriental KL. For dining reservations, call 03 2179 8797/8798 or email mokul-fb@mohg.com.

(Source : <https://my.asiatatler.com/dining/chef-luigi-stinga-mandarin-oriental-kl-debut-italian-menu>)