

HIP HANGOUT

THE SUNDAY NATION

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The art of fine CHINESE DINING

POPULAR HONG KONG CHEF MAN WAI YIN TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO CLASSIC CUISINE WITH WESTERN FLAIR

KHETSIRIN PHOLHAMPALIT
THIS SUNDAY NATION

ONE OF the most popular venues for dim sum and Peking duck in Bangkok, it's almost impossible to walk into one of Man Wai Yin's Chef Man outlets and get a table right away. So keen are diners to munch on his delicacies that reservations at all three branches need to be made well in advance.

Now the Hong Kong native is turning his attention to another, more upmarket restaurant, M Krub, offering contemporary Chinese fare in a private-dining, club-like atmosphere.

At his new place on the second floor of the new Mahanakorn Cube Building, advance reservations are required to savor Cantonese foods injected with Western elements like foie gras, Iberico pork, caviar, wagyu beef and black truffles. Gone is the perception of a family feast with platters piled high to be replaced by small portions created with such attention to detail that every morsel has exactly the right balance of ingredients, flavours, textures and colours even before it's arranged on the beautiful dinnerware.

Set in a contemporary decor in a spacious 300-square-metre area, M Krub's main dining area has nine tables to accommodate 40 diners, plus one private room that seats another 10. There's no à la carte menu; only set meals are available for both lunch and dinner at set prices, ranging from the six-course lunch for ฿12,000 to the top-tier 10-course dinner for ฿12,800 per person. Dishes in the menu can be tailor-made to match your preference, and that's why you're required to book in advance. The menu changes according to the fresh and seasonal produce available.

"I want to change the common perception that Chinese food is an oily banquet with tasteless food design. I have a team of five chefs and one of them is also a food designer whose job is to make stimulating dishes with different textures and presentations. It's a refined version of Cantonese food," Man explains.

"It's essential to find the best seasonal ingredients to achieve such delicate and intense flavours as wagyu



Baked Cod Fish with Black Garlic



Roast Iberico Pork Loin with Comb Honey



Baked Wagyu Beef Rib Eye with Mustard Cream



Chinese Cabbage Consomme



Sautéed Scallop and Crispy Nest



Sampling dishes of beech wood-smoked pomfret, crispy duck roll and trio tofu



Chef Man's latest venture is the upmarket, private-dining restaurant M Krub serving contemporary Cantonese fare with a twist.



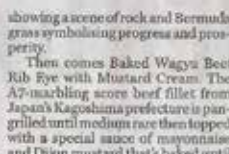
Sweeten Chrysanthemum Tofu in Almond Syrup



Fried Assorted Grains served in Stone Casserole



Lemon Tart Revisited and Green Tea Meringue



Assorted Grains served in Stone Casserole

beef from Japan, foie gras from France and scallop from Australia." Man began his career in the culinary industry at the age of 13, working first as a kitchen understudy then moving through the ranks in a Hong Kong restaurant before relocating to Bangkok in 1996. Over the last two decades, he has honed his skills as executive Chinese chef at the Amari Hotel before setting up his first Chef Man restaurant in 2011 under Chef Man Group of Restaurants.

Before I set off on my culinary journey across the seven-course lunch set (฿13,000), I'm offered a tasting menu: that's fortunately small

Though the plate is plain white bone china, it's meticulously decorated with food-colouring gel painted by hand with bamboo along with the date of the serving written in Chinese calligraphy and a Chinese stamp in lieu of M Krub's signature. On offer is beechwood-smoked pomfret, a morsel of crispy duck skin slowly braised in Chinese cooking wine and stuffed with glutinous rice, and a trio of tofu with layers of bean curd mixed with fole gras, carrot and spinach and topped with crabmeat and caviar. The set meal starts with Roast Iberico Pork Loin with Comb Honey

Here, the Japanese Iberico is marinated for hours before being roasted to perfection in the tradition of Hong Kong honey-roasted pork. The fillet sits on a honey-comb bed from Australia that enhances both look and taste and the dish is garnished with sugar art sculpted in a form of a flower holding roasted walnuts.

Next up is Sautéed Scallop and Crispy Nest for which the Australian scallop is sautéed then placed on top of mango sauce and a deep-fried crispy nest painstakingly made from baked finely julienned bread dough before being garnished with caviar. The dish is also hand painted with food colouring and

showing a scene of rock and Serradella grass symbolising progress and prosperity.

Then comes Baked Wagyu Beef Rib Eye with Mustard Cream. The A7-marbling score beef fillet from Japan's Kagoshima prefecture is pan-grilled until medium rare then topped with a special sauce of mayonnaise and Dijon mustard that's baked until golden brown.

For those who prefer to stay away from beef, the Baked Cod Fish with Black Garlic has a wonderfully complex flavour. The black garlic, according to Man, is produced according to the art of Korean cuisine and doesn't have a strong taste, but an almost jelly-like texture with sweet and tangy aftertaste.

"Black garlic is very popular in Korea thanks to its healthy properties. Rich in antioxidants and easy to digest, it's made by heating whole bulbs of garlic in a machine that fluctuates the temperature and humidity over a course of 60 days," says the chef.

The next serving is a palate cleanser of Chinese Cabbage Consomme made from 20 kilograms of local Chinese cabbage steamed for seven hours to extract the clear soup, giving it the natural sweetness of the vegetable without added water. The 20kg of cabbage can give about 20 bowls of soup, and each meat-free bowl is served together with the cabbage core.

Another pleasing dish is Fried

Assorted Grains served in Stone Casserole. Oats, barley, brown rice and sweet corn are served in a piping hot stone casserole, accompanied by lard oil, abalone sauce, home-made XO sauce, diced Yunnan ham, crispy fried garlic and fresh chopped spring onion. The diner gets to mix and cook all ingredients in the casserole until crusty.

The next amazing creation is Sweeten Chrysanthemum Tofu in Almond Syrup. For this dessert, the chef painstakingly uses a sharp knife to carve a tofu chunk into the form of a blooming chrysanthemum. It's garnished with gold leaf and served in almond flavoured rock sugar syrup.

The culinary experience ends with Lemon Tart Revisited and Green Tea Meringue. The green tea meringue, five-spice biscuits and lemon curd are artistically wrapped in a lemon flavoured and shaped sugar crust. It's surrounded by lemon-flavoured foam and you have to break the sugar crust to get a perfect blend of oriental sugar flower art with Western meringue.

Despite the hard work, the meals are feasts of fun and enjoyment. Each dish is delicious and demands a time-consuming cooking process together with artistic presentation.

At M Krub, the surprises are as spectacular as the flavours.

FOOD IN A CUBE

■ M Krub is on the second floor of Mahanakorn Cube Building on Narathiwat Rajanakarn Road (BTS, Chong Nohai station).

■ It's open daily for lunch, 11.30am to 2.30pm and for dinner, 6 to 10.30pm.

■ Call (02) 019 8105 or visit the "ManukMahanakorn" page on Facebook.