



# PRESTIGE

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**TITSNOW**  
GLE BELLS  
BUDAPEST

**GUAR XE**  
NLEASH  
IE BEAST

**PASA THAI**  
CROSSING THE  
LANGUAGE  
BARRIER

**DOONA BAE**  
CONQUERING  
THE WEST

**BUA AND NIKS**  
**ANUMAN RAJADHON**  
THE TIES THAT BIND









# Artistic Impressions

Celebrity chef Man Wai Yin's new restaurant, MKRUB, is a feast for the eyes as well as for the palate. SOFIE LISBY submits herself to this sensory experience

Photography: SURACHET H.

Seated in the plush chairs at the back of M Krub, one can closely follow the construction progress of the MahaNakhon tower. The construction of a building of this scale is a sight to behold; the flying sparks from someone's welding torch light up bare concrete beams while cranes balance large slates of metal high above the ground. A construction worker, his only safety equipment an unfastened white helmet, sits precariously close to a ledge of what will soon be a floor in Thailand's tallest building. The sound of heavy metal tools is barely audible over the soft music playing in the restaurant.

The commotion of the site outside is a stark contrast to the calm and sophistication inside M Krub. Chef Man Wai Yin's first foray into the world of fine dining. Richly coloured carpets complement shining grey marble tiles, and glass chandeliers light up a space that is otherwise darkened by wood panelling and heavy curtains. On dark wood cabinets around the dining room stand plates with intricate Chinese calligraphy, and near the entrance a temperature-

controlled room displays beautifully decorated glass and porcelain ware as well as prized imported produce such as abalone from Japan and South Africa and fine French truffles.

A clientele of what looks like office workers sit around white-clothed tables set with mother of pearl plates, mother of pearl spoons and beautifully folded and embroidered cloth napkins. Next to the plates lay traditional Chinese decorative knots for good luck that guests can take home. Inside the knot is a carefully folded menu printed on parchment paper. Despite the decidedly Chinese theme, there is not a single Lazy Susan in sight.

The reason being M Krub is not a traditional Chinese restaurant, explains Man Wai Yin. "The perception of Chinese food is lots of plates placed on a Lazy Susan in the middle of a large table, served as and when the dishes are ready. This is the way most Chinese restaurants serve their food; for the taste, not for the eyes. I wanted to make Chinese food more presentable. I wanted to create a restaurant with the taste of China but the fine dining traditions of France."

Man Wai Yin requires little introduction. With no formal chef training, Hong Kong-born Man began working in the kitchens of Chinese restaurants at the age of 13 because, as he explains, he didn't much enjoy "classroom stuff". In 2011 he set up the first Chef Man restaurant at the Eastin Makkasan Hotel and the 2012 opening of its sister restaurant at the new Eastin

Grand Hotel Sathorn solidified his position as one of the best Chinese chefs in Bangkok. Within months, the traditional Hong Kong style restaurant with its popular Cantonese dim sum menu had garnered a several week long waiting list.

Understandably, expectations for M Krub are high. The restaurant has been almost two years in the making, the chef painstakingly researching old recipes and food traditions from China and replicating them in a contemporary Bangkok setting, using ingredients imported from all over the world. Along the way he would invite friends and business associates to sample his creations, listen to their feedback, return to the kitchen, tweak the recipe ever so slightly, then start all over again.

The result is a unique combination of traditional Chinese dishes – think silken tofu and fish maw soup – made with imported ingredients and plated for each individual diner using plating techniques commonly associated with French *nouvelle cuisine*. A good example is the egg white *aumônière* (a French term used for small pockets, typically

OPPOSITE PAGE: EGG WHITE AUMÔNIÈRE WITH FRESH CRAB MEAT AND FISH MAW.





made of filo pastry, with sweet or savoury filling), which arrives on a matte black plate.

A bright yellow soup made of chicken broth and Japanese pumpkin fills the plate's indentation and in the middle of the soup floats a neatly wrapped egg white *aumônière* with a filling of fish maw and mushroom soup. Salmon roe and cubes of dragon fruit, kiwi and strawberry add bursts of colour. It could well be a French dish, the only giveaway is the familiar taste the *aumônière*'s fish maw and mushroom filling.

However, the food is not fusion, explains Chef Man. "I like to call it a cross-over between Chinese and Western cuisine. Traditionally, Chinese food would be served family-style and the emphasis on the chef in Chinese cooking is not as pronounced as in Western food culture. I want to change that, I want to make Chinese food beautiful and refined, using smaller plates. It is still Chinese food and with Chinese taste, but the concept is



contemporary."

One of the ways in which Chef Man tries to satisfy both the palate and the eyes is by incorporating traditional Chinese calligraphy into the plating. Each dish comes with its own distinct calligraphy, made on the day, courtesy of a young Chinese artist employed for the single purpose of decorating the plates. "French food has long been known to create art on the plate using creative plating techniques. China also has a long tradition for art and I wanted to bring that to the plate. I thought calligraphy is a good



example of traditional Chinese art that can be presented along with fine food."

The calligraphy adds a nice touch to dishes such as the chilli horse crab meat. The glass ramekin containing the crab meat arrives on a wooden plate, which has carved into it Chinese characters. Beneath it, the carefully painted calligraph of a bamboo stalk, signed and dated by the artist, almost beg for sharing on social media. Beauty aside, the dish is light and delicate in taste; horse crab meat imported from Shanghai sit atop a layer of jelly made of spinach tofu, accompanied by vinegar and ginger.

The gratinated beef rib eye with mustard cream comes on a plate of white marble decorated with sugar art, the only accompaniment being a tube of mustard and a cube each of dragon fruit and orange. There need not be anything else; the richness of the Australian wagyu beef is well balanced by a layer of gratinated mustard cream that manages to be both sweet and tart

**CLOCKWISE (FROM LEFT):** THE INTERIOR OF M KRUB; HORSE CRAB MEAT ON A CARVED PIECE OF WOOD; SLIGHTLY SWEETENED CHRYSANTHEMUM TOFU; **OPPOSITE PAGE (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT):** FRIED ASSORTED GRAINS WITH CONDIMENTS ON THE SIDE; DESSERTS ARE THE DOMAIN OF FRENCH PASTRY CHEF MARC RAZUREL; CHEF MAN WAI YIN; GRATINATED BEEF RIB WITH MUSTARD CREAM; BLACK FOREST DESSERT WITH BLACK TRUFFLE CHOCOLATE CRÈME





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at the same time.

The most interesting of the dishes – and incidentally also the most 'Asian' dish – is the assorted grain served in a sizzling stone casserole. Taking inspiration from Hong Kong's famous baked rice but using a stone pot not dissimilar to that of the Korean *bibimbap*, a total of 12 different grains come undressed surrounded by small bowls with condiments. While the grains sizzle in the pot, the waiter mixes in lard, homemade abalone sauce, Chinese ham from Yunnan province, homemade XO sauce, crispy garlic and sweet corn. A sprinkle of chives and an instruction to leave the grains to sizzle until they harden at the edges complete the dish. It is comfort food

taken to a higher level, the texture of the grain, the silky fattiness of the lard and the umami of the abalone ticking all the right boxes.

With dessert, Chef Man turns things upside down, serving traditional French pastry – made by young French pastry chef Marc Razurel – with touches of Asia. The black forest is a decadent concoction of chocolate crème with black truffle and cherry mousse, served on top of 'moss' made of green tea mousse and 'soil' made of crunchy chocolate powder. It comes to the table wrapped in the smoke of burned Australian cherry wood. The combination of smoke, chocolate, truffle, green tea and cherry is a curious but nonetheless tasty one.

And perhaps that is the lesson at M Krub. It doesn't necessarily matter where the ingredients are from or from where the dish takes its inspiration as long as it tastes good. ■

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