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Opening Hours: (Closed Tuesday)
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You can expect high-end, authentic Chinese cuisine at China China. (Pictures by Steve Sarre, 22546594)

Think you know your Chinese food? So did Aaron Carpenter and friends until they tried a plethora of new and delicious flavours at China China

FOR a small island, Guernsey has its fair share of Chinese restaurants and takeaways. Many of those provide guilty pleasures and go-to favourites – for me it's beef in black bean sauce, chicken chow mein and duck rolls. Read the menus and the only thing telling them apart are the names, the reputations and the quality of the last meal you ate there.

However, situated in the Mallard Complex is a restaurant very new to the market. China China, led by a head chef who cut his teeth at the five-star Four Seasons Hotel in Mayfair, London, had everything I was looking for.

It had all the favourites on the menu, it had attentive staff and most of all, and how welcome it was, it introduced me to high-end, authentic Chinese cuisine that gave me that rare feeling.

That 'I haven't eaten anything like this before' feeling.

No dish better encapsulated this than the first served up to myself and my party of four.

Named 'Red Lantern', I had little foreknowledge of what the sharing starter would be.

It was a show-stopper. Tender soft-shell crab coated in a batter so thin and light that all you get is a texture.

Any thicker and it would have overpowered the crab, instead it enhanced it.

There was craft in the cooking but also in the presentation, as you trawled through a large bowl of roasted, decorative – but edible – chilli 'lanterns'.

First impressions – this is a restaurant that truly cares what you think about their food before you eat it. A restaurant that wants you to experience something.

Next up was turbot served on a long, rectangular sharing platter dressed in red chilli, fried mint leaves, spinach, a lightly-spiced crumb and accompanied by a creamy and subtly flavoured sauce.

The cooking of the turbot – as I expected it would be after the first seafood dish – was spot-on.

The accompaniments were intelligent, absolutely belonged there, and were in just the right quantity to complement the turbot.

This was followed by individual plates of chargrilled prawn, asparagus, lemon and pea sauce and a decorative umbrella – something so far detached from my

expectations ahead of this review. Not only was it fun, I have to stress again how clever it was, how the flavours harmonised on the plate. The sauces were fresh and light.

On the subject of condiments, the next dish brought a few to the table – and to the discussion.

A perfectly-cooked scallop, covered with a chilli chutney and apple crisp, sat above a micro-salad of fresh fruit.

And that chutney carried a kick; a memorable 'Are you sure you don't want to share the recipe with me?' kind of kick.

The variety on the plate made sure every mouthful of the scallop – which I would have liked more of – tasted different.

I was keen to find out what the meat side of its menu had to offer, and that came in the shape of braised shoulder of lamb in a cumin sauce with a selection of vegetables.

Beautifully crafted and presented, we had to pause – as we did with almost everything that was brought to us – and just admire it first before tucking in.

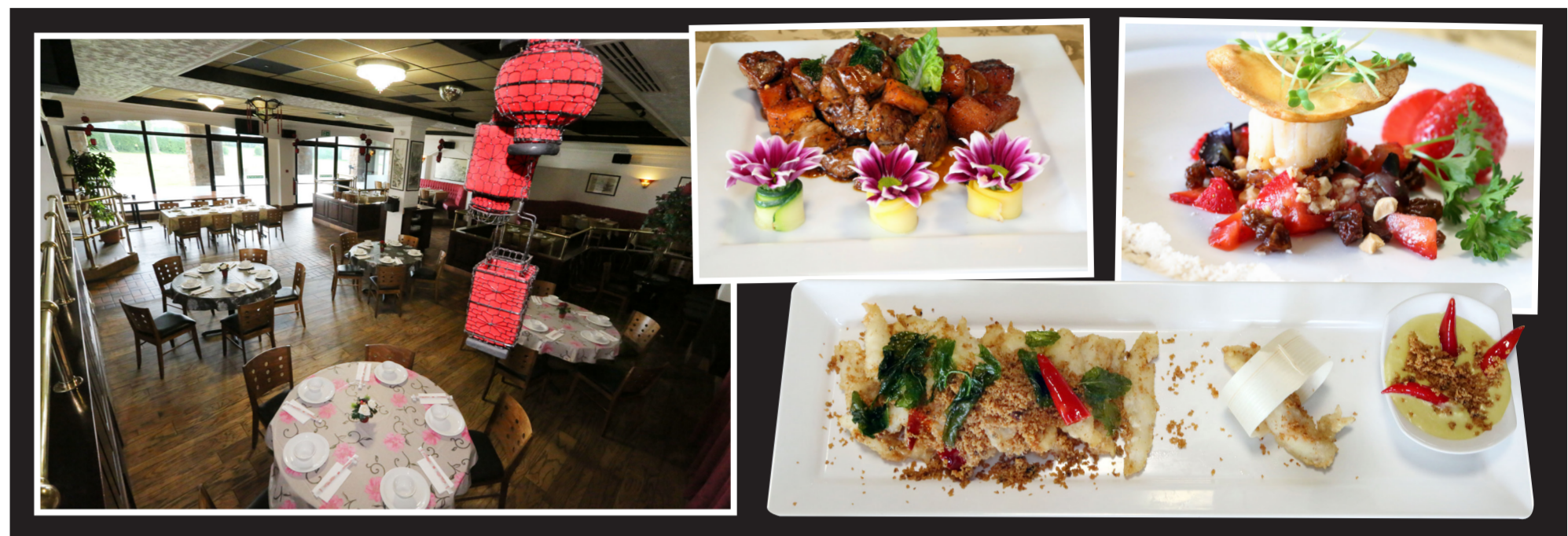
The flavours in the dish were robust, the sauce rich and warming, and the vegetables cooked through enough to take on all those flavours without losing their texture.

Once that was cleared we tried a sharing platter of beef fillet, which took centre stage amid a bed of exotic vegetables and flowers.

What can you say about a high-quality, slowly-cooked beef fillet? You just take a few minutes to yourself, withdraw from the conversation, and that speaks for itself.

I felt as though I was eating a lot of these dishes from a Chinese restaurant for the first time.

Just to check they could pull off the



takeaway staples with as much aplomb – and despite having shared all of the above – I ordered some crispy chilli rice and ramen noodles.

The rice was light and the spices subtle and varied, the chilli understated and acceptable to any palate.

The noodles were just supposed to be a treat. Something I snacked on while waiting for dessert. They were succulent, full of little pockets of flavour, not greasy. They deserved to be polished off.

As for the dessert, after a large meal we craved something light and fresh. That came in the form of a mango pudding, the creamy texture softening the sharpness of the mango.

It was a welcome sweet treat in a luxurious savoury menu.

Having eaten in the restaurant, with everything crafted and presented the way the talented head chef conceived it to be, it seems almost criminal to think about cramming any of this into takeaway boxes.

However, the phone was ringing off the hook as the restaurant manager informed me they were recruiting additional chefs to meet demand – that side of business also seems to be thriving.

So whether it's a new favourite takeaway you're after, or a restaurant experience to remember, China China will change how you feel about that country's cuisine.



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