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Friends @ Jelita

"We are not in the food business. We are not in the service business. We are in the 'making-people-happy' business," declared Thomas Chiam, the owner of Friends.

After the success of its first outlet at Serangoon Gardens, Friends opened a second outlet at Jelita, just minutes away from Holland Village, earlier this year. The 80-seater restaurant is chic yet comfortable, with soothing warm tones of brown and grey. The day I went, basso nova music was playing in the background, and the overall effect was one of comfort and tranquillity.

The first dish I tried, a timbale of salmon tartare, guacamole and caviar (\$16.90), was a light and pleasing appetiser. The diced salmon was not too fine, and thus the tartare was firm and not at all mushy, unlike some other salmon tartares I've tried. The guacamole also gave the visually appealing appetiser a creamy taste.

Friends is upfront about its ingredients and proudly lists its foie gras dish as duck liver instead of attempting to masquerade it as the more upmarket goose liver. Despite the fact that many customers will not be able to tell the difference, Mr Chiam is adamant about being honest with his patrons.

Executive Chef Peter Boon pairs duck liver with a pickled rhubarb and apple sauce (\$28.90, main picture), creating an unusual but appetising contrast in taste - the buttery duck liver is offset by the slightly sweet and sour sauce. The result: an indulgent dish with a refreshing twist.

The Ukrainian borsch (\$12.90) is different from most soups I've tried, including the Russian version of borsch. For one, it uses lots of beetroot - in fact, the red colour of the soup stems chiefly from the beetroot, rather than the tomato. It is also less chunky than the Russian version, and has fewer chunks of meat.

Mr Chiam assured me that this was intentional: "Otherwise the soup, originally meant to be an appetiser, would be a meal in itself!" But he added that if a customer wants to have more chunks of beef, all he needs to do is ask.

While Friends' appetisers do tickle the tastebuds, it's the main courses that wow.

I tried the Roast Kami Sakura chicken supreme (\$19.90, right), which is made from specially bred chickens. Most diners dislike breast meat, as it is tougher and dryer. However, Kami Sakura chickens are a special breed. Mr Chiam said these chickens are selected as chicks and grow up being fed on a special feed, and have no hormone injections to speed up their growth. As a result, they are smaller than most other commercially bred chickens, but their meat is juicier.

If I had any doubts, they were laid to rest the minute I bit into the chicken dish. The chicken breast was extremely tender, and the ricotta cheese stuffing was well balanced and did not overwhelm the natural goodness of the chicken. This is a must-try, if only to experience how tender chicken breast meat can be.

Another main dish which I enjoyed was the beef bourguignon with bacon potato and roast vegetables (\$32.90). I liked how Chef Boon prepared the beef chunks - instead of stewing or marinating the whole chunk of beef for hours on end, he simply allowed it to sit in a drop of the red wine reduction. The result: beef that was sufficiently tender but not too soft, and had a good bite.

Dessert was a most unusual 'cappuccino'. Meant to be eaten, not drunk, this hazelnut & mascarpone cappuccino (\$10.90) comprised of a layer of hazelnut crunch topped with mascarpone and ground hazelnuts. If you love hazelnuts, you'll love this.

While the food at Friends is enjoyable and certainly worth trying, the charm of the eatery lies in the atmosphere that surrounds you once you enter: A sense of tranquillity and leisure, and a quiet assurance that no matter how your day has been, here is one place where you can lay aside your cares for a couple of hours while you enjoy a good meal.

After all, Friends is not about just food, it is about 'making you happy'.

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www.friendsfoodandwine.com
Opening hours: 12 noon - 11pm daily
There are complimentary outdoor reserved lots for guests - call the restaurant for details.

READERS COMMENTS

The food at Friends @ Jelita is exceptionally good. In fact, it is indeed one of the most impressive I've tried in Singapore.

The quality of the ingredients is consistently high and fresh, hence the price tag, which to some, may figure a little higher than usual, but absolutely justifiable.

However, on the minus side is the acoustics of the place. "Tranquility" certainly is not what you will find if you happen to go there on a busy day. As there is a lot of glass and hard, reflective surfaces, be prepared for sound that bounces all over the place, especially when there is a crowd ... Lovers, beware - try going during off-peak hours if you want a romantic tete-a-tete.

That said, however, Friends @ Jelita scores high on my list - kudos to the chef!

Barbara Tan

Posted by: Posted at Tue Jul 17 20:35:30 SGT 2007

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