

Monday, May 15, 2015

Philippe: An Upscale Take on Beijing Cuisine

By Channaly Philipp



Chinese cuisine and upscale aren't words you often find in the same sentence. For a long time, Chinese cuisine has suffered from a stigma that, as far as general perceptions go, has relegated it to the realm of takeout rather than fine dining.

That's a pity. There is exciting work from a new generation of chefs, such as Fung Tu's Jonathan Wu, whose cooking is at once traditional and innovative (smoked and fried dates filled with duck, anyone?) But the glass ceiling, in terms of prices, is very much there.

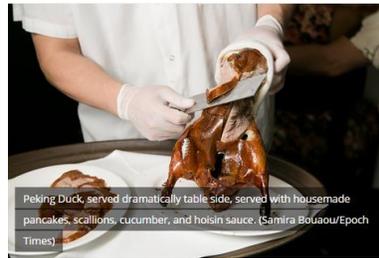
So I'm always curious when I encounter an upscale Chinese restaurant. Hakkasan, in the Theatre District, for example, offers killer Cantonese. The online menu doesn't feature prices, which should be a clue to its priciness. If not, the fact that whole Peking duck is served with Ossetra caviar should offer another.

Another upscale Chinese restaurant, but focused on Beijing-style cuisine, Philippe, is celebrating its 10th year in business. It's notable for the A-list celebs that have crossed its threshold: Rihanna, Matt Damon, Robert de Niro, and many more.



Over Memorial Day weekend, Philippe is set to enter nightlife entertainment by opening The Club at Philippe in East Hampton, with world class DJs, chef Philippe Chow's signature dishes, and late night bites.

Speaking of stars, that star shine extends to the dishes, in a very literal way. They are served family style, in the traditional way, which I liked.



The Peking Duck, served dramatically table side, glows with a deep golden amber lacquer (\$75 for a 7-pound duck). It takes 45 minutes to get it ready once you order, so it's advised to order it as soon as you get there.

The table side carving only reinforces any hunger pangs: the sight of the gleaming duck skin, and the crackling sound of the skin as the knife slices through. It proves anticipation is the best appetite stimulant. The skin is, of course, the best part of a Peking duck. The thin pancakes here are housemade, and the duck makes for a good feast for about three people.



We also enjoyed the buttery American Black Bass, half of it served with garlic, the other with black bean (\$30 for one; \$60 for two). The Salt & Pepper Lobster (market price) also satisfies lobster cravings.



In several other dishes, like the Crispy Beef, the flavor is predominantly sweet, especially with a top note of sugar. It must work for a lot of people—the restaurant was buzzing on a Monday evening when I

went. But I find too often Chinese cooks and chefs, as in this case, cater to palates that crave sweet, at the price of balance.

For example, the waiter highly recommended the popular Chicken Satay with chef Chow's famous peanut sauce. It comes in a gorgeous coral hue, glistening on a skewer. But here too the flavor skews too sweet for my taste, almost caramel-like.



Libations draw inspiration from the East, such as the signature Philipptini (\$19), with Absolut vodka, lychee, pineapple juice, Citronage, and Chambord; or the Shanghai Philippe (Stoli Strawberry, elderflower syrup, fresh strawberries, and champagne, \$19).



Lunch can be a more affordable affair if you opt for the special. There's a three-course lunch special, Monday through Saturday (noon–3 p.m.), for \$23.95, or for the power lunch with a martini, \$32.95.

Philippe
33 E. 60th St.
212-644-8885
PhilippeChow.com

The Club at Philippe opens Memorial Day weekend.
Hamptons location:
44 Three Mile Harbor Road
631-324-3332