



Sign Of Three

By Anne Loh

IT'S DIFFICULT to keep a good man down and it's tough to keep anything a secret too long. Toa Payoh is the town to watch — it's the first suburb to get a fully air-conditioned bus terminal, and now, it has its very own award-winning big-league Chinese chef.

After almost 12 years as the Chinese executive chef of Pan Pacific Hotel's Hai Tien Lo, Chef Chan Chen Hei has branched out on his own, making his cuisine more accessible. "I do not charge hotel prices here and so you will not find abalone on my menu," says Chef Chan. However, he has maintained the quality of his offerings, from giving guests a selection of premium Chinese teas such as Gao Shan (High Mountain) to signature dishes on the menu, all in an exclusive environment enriched by various pieces from his antique collection.

Four appetisers to try are the steamed air-dried eel, almost translucent bony slices accompanied by sliced leeks; Nanjing duck in all its salted tenderness; sautéed sliced cuttlefish with salt and pepper; and sautéed oyster with bittergourd, offering a textural contrast.

An unusual dish is what has been named A Taste of Southern Sung (it is not yet listed on the menu). An orange has been hollowed out, the pulp mixed with crabmeat and then steamed, fruit and all! For many, this presents an interesting experience of eating warm orange, mingling with sea flavours presented by the crabmeat.

Chef Chan has retained his three of many signature

dishes on the menu. Braised supreme shark's fin with crab roe is a bright orange-coloured hearty broth chockfull of ingredients. His crispy skin chicken edges out the Peking duck, as the skin is so thin and crisp, to the extent of leaving the flesh! Not to mention the meat is moist and absolutely succulent. Another of his signatures is the sautéed beef tenderloin with black pepper. It really impresses as the meat has a melt-in-the-mouth quality, while the accompanying vegetables still retain their crunch.

One of the most luxurious desserts has to be double-boiled supreme bird's nest in coconut — a rich warm dessert which needs advance ordering of at least four hours.

Re-familiarise yourself again with Chef Chan's consummate skill in the kitchen and be thankful that he has deigned to cook among us!

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An Invitation