

The Mushroom Pot

WHEN I FIRST PASSED BY THE THE RESTAURANT SIGN I THOUGHT TO MYSELF IT WAS ALL MUSHROOMS AND VEGETARIAN DISHES, IT WAS JUST STEAMBOAT. HOW WERE MY FRIENDS AND I GOING TO FILL OURSELVES AS WE WERE STARVING?
BY CAROL KRAAL.

I was glad we decided to give The Mushroom Pot a try because there are so many other things besides mushrooms, and other styles of cooking from stirfry to braising and so on. And yes, there was meat. Lots of it. And seafood. The restaurant offers basically Chinese fusion cuisine, and the dishes we tried are certainly creative and delicious. There is a buffet menu, an ala carte menu and a set meal menu so you can order according to what you desire and how many people are in your party. The individual set meals are good value for money and are very popular with the office lunch crowd. It is styled like Japanese bento and comes with starter, main and sides. Very speedy and yet is very good quality food.

Liza Wang, the pretty and friendly owner of Mushroom Pot, was inspired to open the restaurant after a trip to China where she saw a tiny hole-in-the-wall eatery serving hotpot with mushrooms as the main theme. The smells were enticing so Liza and her husband decided to try it. They were enraptured. Liza thought it would be a good idea replicate this in Singapore as it was a unique concept and Singaporeans certainly go all out for good food.

And so Mushroom Hotpot was born. But instead of just mushrooms, a whole spectrum of other goodness awaits at the restaurant. The signature dish is the hotpot with one side of the pot a spicy ma la stock while the other is a delicious wild mushroom stock that is not spicy at all and is ideal for children.

My friends and I started off with an appetiser platter of wild mushrooms with Thai spice, mushroom salad and mushroom rolls. The rolls are crunchy on the outside and the mushroom mince is moist and flavourful in the inside. It is important that the delicate mushrooms do not lose their character, flavour and texture when cooked, and when mixed with other ingredients, and the restaurant succeeds in doing this well.

Next came house specialities: cod fish steak with matsutake, monkey head mushrooms in house dressing, szechuan style salt and pepper prawns and Tibet ribs. The fish was fresh and tender and cooked just right, and I loved the monkey head mushrooms not only because it sounds cute but because it had a crunchy deep fried bite with the walnuts and tossed in a creamy dressing. The Tibet ribs were meltingly tender in a sweet rich sauce and the prawns were spicy and fresh. I was impressed by the freshness of the items and the flavours were delicious with just the right amounts of saltiness, sweetness and spiciness. All harmonising very well.

For the hotpot we tried a selection of items which included: fresh tiger prawns, fresh scallops, squid, fish fillet, beef fillet, handmade prawn balls and fishballs, pork paste with mushrooms, tofu, Japanese glass noodles and vegetables. Again everything is fresh and the prawn balls and fish balls are homemade. The ma la stock is fiery spicy and delicious while the wild mushroom stock delicate yet flavourful.

Of course the uniqueness of the restaurant is the focus on mushrooms and these are all fresh and seasonal. They are sourced mainly from the forests of China and range from common to rare and expensive varieties – as many as 20 different kinds to try. There are morel, porcini, chanterelle, caesar's mushroom, coral mushroom, matsutake, flower of fungi, termite mushroom, cow spunk, Russula-like waxy cap, poplar field-cap, gypsy mushroom, horn of plenty, monkey head, and more. If you're a mushroom lover like me this is paradise. I love not only the way they are named but also how they look. The flower of fungi looks like it drapes a delicate tulle dress around its cap, while the chanterelle are a stunning yellow.

Mushrooms have for centuries been known for their health benefits. They increase immunity, promote blood circulation, reduce fatigue, reduce cholesterol and improve digestion. I like the 'reduce cholesterol' part so it gives me an excuse to enjoy even more things on the menu without feeling guilty. Where else can you enjoy your food and get a healthy dose of healing from beautiful mushrooms?



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