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## Amateur chefs compete to represent Hong Kong in young kitchen talent contest

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*Six cooks, three of them still in secondary school, take on challenge of preparing spinach soufflé and roast lamb. Winner enters regional contest for shot at world finals and a Michelin internship*

Six young amateur Hong Kong cooks in white jackets and chef's hats – three of them still in secondary school – were bent over hot stoves preparing two set dishes. As they worked away at soufflé à la Florentine, or spinach soufflé, and roast rack of lamb with garden vegetables, the judges who would adjudicate on their entries circled the kitchen at the Towngas Cooking Centre in Causeway Bay, observing how they performed on food safety, hygiene and food wastage.

***WATCH one of the young chefs apply the finishing touches to a dish***

Young chef plating a lamb cutlet



A professional chef, Mike Lo, supervised them, periodically telling them to hurry up or reminding them to check their soufflés in the oven.

“They are young chefs and need time for improvement,” said one of the judges, Pauline Wong of Towngas, as she walked around the cooking stations.



Hilda Leung, the eventual winner, takes part in the Disciples Escoffier Young Talent Trophy Hong Kong selection.

When the allotted three hours were up, Lo got the contestants to plate their dishes and presented them in pairs to the judges in a room next door, who would determine which of the six would represent Hong Kong in the regional finals of the Disciples Escoffier Young Talent Trophy.

#### [Disciples to offer valuable lessons](#) [1]

The contest, for chefs with less than five years' kitchen experience, is organised by Disciples Escoffier, an association of more than 25,000 chefs devoted to continuing the work of French chef, restaurateur and food writer Georges Auguste Escoffier, who modernised cooking techniques in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Young Talent Trophy is intended to encourage training, leadership development and innovation in young

chefs.



Young chefs compete in the Disciples Escoffier Young Talent Trophy Hong Kong selection.

As the contestants were being judged, Lo went over some of his observations with them. He said nearly all of them had been disorganised, hadn't made the best use of their cooking stations and lacked awareness of how important timing was in putting a dish together.

Lo also gave them a tip on cooking sauces. "Almost all your sauces were overcooked because you set the heat at maximum and when the heat goes over the circumference of the pan then the sauce will be bitter. When you work in a restaurant, they will expect you to know this already."

In the end the judges, having taken into account their earlier observations and considered the dishes' appearance and taste, had an easy decision. Hilda Leung Ngar-lam was declared the victor, and Wong said the 28-year-old had won hands down. "She was very organised and most of the time neat and tidy and knows what she's doing."



Leung puts the finishing touches to her roast rack of lamb with garden vegetables.

Leung, who set up an amateur cooking studio in Hong Kong, said after accepting her award: "I was very nervous at first because it was my first time competing. I practiced timing myself twice and I learned from chef Vincent [Leroux] for a year." Leroux is president of the Hong Kong delegation of Disciples Escoffier and director of the Institut Culinaire Disciples Escoffier.

Wong explained some of the things the judges consider. "We look at the temperature of the food, the plating and then taste. Some think that food needs to be healthy, but that affects the taste. We need to bring out the flavours of the ingredients, but some are too afraid to add salt so many of the dishes we tasted were very bland. For example, turnips don't have much

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taste, but Hilda used saffron to bring out the flavour. That takes passion.”

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Pauline Wong, judge



Gordon Tang puts the finishing touches to his soufflés. Gordon Tang Tsz-yuk, of Jules Bistro in Happy Valley, was adjudged first runner-up and Celia Ho Tze-ching, a student at St Paul's Convent School in Causeway Bay, second runner-up.

Leung will represent Hong Kong against winners from Macau, China, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam at the [Restaurant & Bar Hong Kong](#) [2] show at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre from September 6-9.

The winner of that event will go on to compete in the world finals in March 2017, where the overall winner will be offered an internship at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Paris.

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