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Escoffier inspired French cooking course heats up HK culinary scene

by ANDREA ZAVADSKY OCTOBER 21, 2014



Overshadowed by the variety of Asian and western-style cuisine available in culinary capital Hong Kong, French cuisine has not yet achieved the deserved peak of its popularity in the territory.

A big leap to rectify this injustice is being made by Towngas Cooking Centre, which is offering a French culinary arts diploma programme directly based on the "Bible" of French cooking, the Escoffier Guide Culinare, first published in 1903.

The current fourth edition of this treasured guide that represents the best of high quality French cooking is used by many of France's most prestigious cooking schools.

While the book is the same, the variation between schools can be large.

"The difference is made by the value of the tutor, and with Vincent Leroux, we are getting the highest quality instructor. We have an additional cooking assistant for 12 culinary students, a high quality venue in Towngas Cooking Centre, plus we only use the best products and ingredients. All these together can achieve excellence," says Robert Fontana, director of Disciples Escoffier, which is an association of world-renowned chefs.



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The objective of the programme is to enable its graduates to take a position as a junior commis chef in any exclusive restaurant.

"Some famous French restaurants in Hong Kong have already shown their interest in our class and are awaiting the end of the programme to offer jobs to our students," says Fontana.

He emphasises that the small-class education course is of a very high standard and it offers value for money. It encourages free interaction between tutors and students, who have to go through beginner, intermediate and advanced level courses before they can graduate and be awarded with the Escoffier Diploma in Culinary Arts.

"We teach our students that the kitchen is love, art and techniques. Our programme is based on three points, understand, master and create," added Leroux.



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There is not likely to be any shouting matches here, in the heat of the kitchen. Teaching will be undertaken in the spirit of passion, creativity, rigour and openness, while students will have to listen, practice what they are taught every day, and work with their heads and hearts.

"We want our students to have a working knowledge of food [and cooking], learn different techniques, the rigour and organisation of work," says Leroux. "All in a good atmosphere and with respect for the culinary art."

Applicants are not required to have any previous knowledge of cooking. "Just be passionate and want to learn French cuisine and history," says Leroux.

If it is true what Monsieur Auguste Escoffier said at the turn of the 20th century and that is "good food is the basis of true happiness", students will be delighted to have participated in the course.

According to Fontana, they received an overwhelming response to the programme right after the announcement and enquiries have been coming in ever since. To meet growing interest, Towngas and Disciples Escoffier are considering offering the next basic level course.

In the meantime, as an introduction for the diploma students, a practical class will be hosted on November 12 by Bernard Dewitte, the Dutch guest chef of the Escoffier Diploma in Culinary Arts programme.

Another 12 extra enrolments will be available for HK\$1,200 per person, offering those interested in joining the next Basic Module a good chance to experience a class from the world-renowned chef.