

CULINARY TRADITIONS

A BITE OF THE PAST

A FEAST FOR THE SENSES



Ruyi Gastronomy recreates the tradition of marrying the tableware to the food to enhance the experience of eating

Ruyi Gastronomy, being held in Beijing, reinterprets the ancestral ideals of the relationships between different foods and the tableware to delight the senses. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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The ancient Chinese book *The Book of Rites* states: "The manner of a gentleman can be depicted from his eating habits."

The book is a compilation of texts describing the ceremonial rituals and social forms, including clothing, music, horticulture, and even exotic recipes, during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) to the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BC-220 AD).

Ancient China had a sophisticated dining etiquette that can be traced back to the Western Zhou Dynasty (BC 1046-771); it emphasized the desirability of serving individual portions and eating with little noises. And, to display the aesthetics of food, the tableware was paired with the dishes.

But over the centuries, Chinese dining culture has changed from serving individual portions to shared plates, from eating with little noises to many noises, and the pairing of tableware with the food is rare.

Now, a gastronomic event is being held in Beijing, which adopts these old traditions and dining etiquette, reinterpreting the ancestral ideals of the relationships between different foods and the tableware to delight the senses.

Beijing Ruyi Gastronomy is being hosted through December 31 in the Ming Dynasty-style Hutong Villa at the Waldorf Astoria Beijing.

It's named after Ruyi, a Buddhist scepter, which symbolizes power and harmony, and which is believed to bestow good wishes and prosperity.

Desmond Chang, the founder of Ruyi Gastronomy and managing director of the French porcelain brand Legle France says: "The dining experience restores what the Chinese table setup was like when they had individual servings, and shows the essence of traditional Chi-

Patisseries and porcelain



From left: Ginger profiterole; Sichuan pepper chocolate praline; red bean macaroon; lotus paste white chocolate mousse with mango. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China World Hotel Beijing is cooperating with the French porcelain brand Legle France to create afternoon teas featuring French pastries made with Chinese ingredients, presented on lotus-themed plates.

The two elegant lotus afternoon tea sets feature nine types of French pastries made with Chinese ingredients, including macarons made with red bean paste, chocolate pralines with Sichuan pepper, and sables with hawthorn and hazelnut.

Jonathan Wu, the hotel's executive pastry chef, says the most difficult to make is the gâteau made with Sichuan chili and cream cheese.

"The difficulty lies in how to balance the flavours of the chili and cheese. The taste of chillies should not overpower the aroma of cheese, but has to still be distinctive," he says.

One of the creations Chef Wu is very satisfied with is the profiteroles made with ginger, vanilla flan and crispy rice. "In a visual sense, it's very appealing with vivid colors. As for the taste, ginger is very recognizable and has long been used as an important herbal ingredient in traditional Chinese medicine. The subtle earthy, pungent taste of ginger also complements the fluffy texture of profiterole."

The pure-white porcelain of the

plates the pastries are served on represents the delicate petals of blossoming lotus. This blossom is delicately depicted against the edges which are painted with vibrant green, evoking the floating leaves of the lotus.

The elegant design is a reminder to slow down and be calm, and it helps quieten the mind and heighten the senses. Just as the flawless lotus rises above the soil and water, so tea-timers can rise above the chaos of the world.

The lotus design was painted by the Hungarian artist Erika Albrecht, who hails from the town of Herend, Hungary, which has been celebrated for centuries for its hand-painted

porcelain. Although Albrecht applies the ancient ways of painting and her work is mainly focused on flowers, birds and fruits, her creative use of rich colours and lines help many of her pieces carry a modern appeal.

"Porcelain is a beautiful, exclusive material which deserves to be updated in a modern way; it doesn't belong just to antiquities," she says.

These dainty desserts will be served with Chinese tea, including 1998 fermented ripe *Puer* tea, premium Tieguanyin oolong tea, and Dahongpao, just to name a few.

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nese dining cultures, which are mostly neglected nowadays."

But how to interpret the essence of Beijing cuisine? Desmond Chang and Chef Menex Cheung of the Waldorf Astoria Beijing went on for the hunt for half a year, visiting food gurus for their opinions, to get to the bottom of what is Beijing cuisine.

They then reached an agreement: Beijing cuisine is an integration of culinary influences from Shandong, Manchuria, and Chinese imperial cuisines.

In Ruyi Gastronomy, nine dishes of

Beijing cuisine with a selection of Chinese spirits and teas are all served on Legle France's Ruyi tableware, a porcelain collection designed only for pairing with Chinese food.

The appetizer *Jiu Gong Ge* immediately creates a "wow factor" to start the whole gastronomic experience.

The nine-in-one starter is presented on nine colorful small round plates in three rows and columns on a platinum rim square platter.

The dish forms a pattern reminiscent of the nine-square grid that was the basis of urban planning in

ancient China.

It comprises little bites of traditional Beijing delicacies including duck web with mustard, jellyfish with vintage vinegar, and pear and hawthorn with osmanthus syrup.

Each of the delicacies is presented on a plate of contrasting color with a pattern representing a characteristic historical cultural element, for example, the Ming Dynasty's (1369-1644) blue and white porcelain and the Song Dynasty's (960-1279) pea green clouds.

The first course is followed by

chicken soup with braised fish maw, a classic soup of Tan Family Cuisine, which dates back to Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and which is now a representative of China's imperial cuisines.

It's a rich nourishing soup made by boiling a combination of three types of free-range, mature chickens; while some pumpkin juice is added to the soup to enhance the texture. The fish maw adds a satisfying crunch.

Interestingly, the drink paired with the soup is also a chicken soup, but this one is much lighter, like

clear water, yet aromatic. So the drink dilutes the rich flavor of the main soup while providing a subtle, yet slightly sweet aftertaste.

The main soup is served in a wide-rimmed gold-colored bowl with a pattern reminiscent of Ming Dynasty furniture on the outside rim. Diners will discover the indigo-blue glazed porcelain inside as they gradually eat up the soup. It reproduces a characteristic color of the famous Jun Kiln of the Song Dynasty.

Another dish — tender lobster balls with a secret sauce — is served with four layers of white plates stacked up incrementally in size; the largest at the bottom. Seen from the top, the plates glazed with thin gold lines form a concentric arrangement.

When you open the lid of the container, the white lobster balls with a golden yellow sauce are revealed, this time, echoing the color of the tableware.

Chang's idea of Ruyi Gastronomy came from a simple conversation he had when he was dining with his friend Peter Ting, a British Chinese porcelain designer in Paris in 2010.

"It turned out we two foodies both love Chinese food the most. But we wondered what had happened to Chinese tableware? There were no complete sets of tableware that could present the beauty of gorgeous Chinese food," he says.

Chang and Ting began working to change this sad state of affairs. After two years, the Ruyi collection designed by Ting was launched for contemporary Chinese fine dining.

After the launch of the Ruyi collection, Chang couldn't help imagining what kind of food could be paired with this amazing tableware, so he designed a series of Ruyi Gastronomy to pairing Chinese dishes with the tableware.

Before the Beijing event, the Ruyi journey began in Hong Kong and Shanghai, interpreting Cantonese cuisine and private kitchens, and Huaiyang cuisine.



Eat Beat

Fan the flames

The popular steakhouse Flamme has launched an array of new summer dishes with a twist at affordable prices: Summer Tomato Berry Salad with Mozzarella Bocconcini (58 yuan), Creamy Potato and Clam Chowder (30 yuan). Its Summer Passionate "Ice-Box" (48

yuan) includes a passion fruit mousse, strawberry panna cotta, crème brûlée, green tea ice cream, and berries Mascarpone, a bit of everything to quench your summer cravings. **Flamme Sanlitun:** S4-33, Taikoo Li Sanlitun, 19 Sanlitun Road; 010-6417-8608 **Famme Indigo:** 269, Indigo Mall, 18

Jiuxianqiao Road; 010-8420-0270

Modern Belgian cuisine

Guest chef Reinout Reniere from Bruges' Restaurant Zeno brings the native tastes of Belgium to Beijing for a lunch and dinner. Since 2007, Chef Reinout has led Restaurant Zeno in crafting gastronomic

delights from hand-sourced, locally harvested ingredients. He will be at Temple Restaurant Beijing for lunch on July 17 (588 yuan includes wine pairing) and dinner on July 18 (888 yuan plus wine pairing). Prices are subject to 15-percent service charge. **Temple Restaurant Beijing:** 23 Songzhusi, Shatanbeijie, Dongcheng district; 010-8400-2232

