

August 29, 2009

Featured Restaurant

The Nautilus Project

Written by: Jackson Sim, Cuisine & Wine Asia

Cuisine

Modern Contemporary with Pan Asian, Australian & New Zealand Influences

Must-try dishes

Nautilus soup kettle, duck Thai red curry and ripened Kikorangi blue cheese salad

Pricing

Appetisers start from S\$8.50, main courses start from S\$25.00 and desserts start from S\$8.50

Chef

Jason Dell & Lucas McMillan

Payment

Cash and all major credit cards accepted

Reservations

6509 1033

Before I embarked on my restaurant review this week, I did a research on the restaurant that I was going and on its rather peculiar name. In all honesty, even before it opened at ION Orchard, I was already in awe with it. I told myself that it will definitely be a seafood restaurant, hence the name. And I was right; the restaurant is actually called The Nautilus Project Bistro & Seafood Bar (The Nautilus Project). But what I didn't know was the fact that the name was also inspired by the space the restaurant occupies. According to the owner and admiral of The Nautilus Project, Ingrid Prasatya, because of its location shaped like a shell, she decided to give it that name and also she wanted to build a new seafood concept restaurant too.

Located on the top floor of ION Orchard, The Nautilus Project is a sight to behold. The breathtaking views of Orchard Road are so spectacular from any angle in the restaurant and one of the restaurant's private dining rooms boasts a teakwood table that weighs a tonne. Apparently, twenty people were needed to carry the table into the restaurant. And what's simply amazing about this new venture from The Society Group is the fact that it's truly a global enterprise. Prasatya is Indonesian, the group's corporate chef, Jason Dell is from New Zealand, The Nautilus Project's head chef, Lucas McMillan is Australian, the restaurant's consultant is Swedish, and the design team is from Japan and not forgetting the fact that the staff members of the restaurant are mostly locals.

Now let us move on to the more important matter at hand – the food, of course! Lunch started off with the most gorgeous and refreshing of amuse bouche. According to Chef Dell, the lobster and vanilla salad that was served is actually part of the restaurant's famous signature lobster trilogy appetiser. Though it was only meant to be an amuse bouche but the portion was enough to let me taste the natural sweetness of the lobster and it was really fresh. The flesh of the lobster was succulent and the vanilla flavour just complemented this amuse bouche so well. The remaining two selections from the lobster trilogy are the caramelised lobster custard and warm lobster soufflé. You'd know a restaurant is good when I dedicate an entire paragraph of my review just for its amuse bouche!

The appetiser of the day is the ripened Kikorangi blue cheese salad. Now this is another winner! The explosion of flavours and tastes from this dish was just amazing and the amount of textures that was included in this salad was just phenomenal. The ripened Kikorangi blue cheese was especially brought in from New Zealand by Chef Dell and though it was ripened, the smell was not as strong as other blue cheeses and it was very creamy and stood out as the star of the dish. The wild rocket gave the salad its share of peppery taste, the pear was crunchy and sweet and the pickled beetroot which Chef Dell and his team of able assistants prepared in house, gave the dish that slight acidity. A drizzle of extra virgin olive oil finishes off the salad perfectly.

Next came the main course and the selections that were brought out for me to try were the signature dishes of The Nautilus Project. As you enter the restaurant, you'd have noticed two big pots which are called kettles used to brew fragrant cooking stocks. And this is the restaurant's major selling point. From the Nautilus soup kettles, guests get to choose between two seafood combination and four cooking stocks. And each of these cooking stocks comes with their own accompaniments. So not wanting to miss out on what's good, the glutton in me said to try them all! And I did and I'm glad I made the bold decision even though I was quite stuffed after that. But that's the sacrifice I would gladly make for good food. The four cooking stocks are Thai spicy coconut, fresh Mediterranean, sweet and sour Sichuan and clam chowder. The seafood used were fresh and these included the mussels, clams, reef fish, salmon, crab and prawns, just to name a few. Some of the accompaniments that came with the soups were steamed fragrant Thai rice, thick rice noodles and crusty French bread.

The Thai spicy coconut was simply extraordinary and even though it had a coconut milk base, it was light and the spiciness was just enough to perk the palate. The fresh Mediterranean, on the other hand, is a tomato base soup and in my personal and humble opinion, I would eat this any day and I don't even need the seafood. Just give me the soup and the crusty French bread and I'd be happy as a clam (no pun intended!). Aside from the Nautilus soup kettles, I also got to try the duck Thai red curry. Because I always have a penchant for duck and all things curry, I lapped this up without even thinking twice. This went well with the steamed fragrant Thai rice which was also the accompaniment for the Thai spicy coconut soup. The duck was first roasted to crisp perfection and the meat was so tender, it just melted in my mouth. The red curry was served gloriously together with the juiciest of lychees and the crispiest and crunchiest of water chestnuts. I thought I was in nirvana, albeit for awhile.

To clear off my palate before the dessert arrived, Chef McMillan served what was later dubbed as the latest in anti-depressant. Apparently, my dining partners were all so smitten with the coconut sorbet that was served; they labelled it the one thing that will turn any sad person to a happy person instantly. And I couldn't agree more really. It was smooth and refreshing, the perfect end to a wonderful meal. Well, that is until the dessert arrived. When the buttermilk vanilla panna cotta was placed in front of me, I could see the vanilla pods crowding the smooth façade of the panna cotta and I knew I would fall in love again. The panna cotta was indeed smooth and the champagne melon soup that went with it provided a whole new taste perspective and the confetti of fruits served with it was just as amazing.