

Doing it French style

Chef de cuisine Jean-Philippe Guiard presents Lafite's latest sophisticated additions

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When it comes to haute cuisine and culture, France has long been the centre of the world, from the sparkling champagnes of Bordeaux and Brittany's Camembert cheeses to the Cote D'Azur's maritime bounty.

Thanks to modern miracles, those without the time or inclination to jet to the French Riviera for an epicurean extravagance can just take a drive to Shangri-La Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, where Lafite serves up an occidental feast worthy of the great chefs themselves.

The upscale eatery has a long pedigree in the city's dining scene, thrilling palates since its establishment in 1985.

Through the years, it has maintained its authentic style and epicurean sensibilities, a tradition that the current chef

de cuisine Jean-Philippe Guiard has every intention of fulfilling.

"Lafite is the perfect match for me," declares Guiard. "I have a strong background in classical French cuisine. When I came on board in 2011, I introduced a number of new signatures to the menu including beef Rossini, lobster bisque and foie gras."

Like the Angouleme-born Guiard, the restaurant's interior is a study in elegance, featuring a unique circular dining area around a cascading water feature with a sunny blue-green hue designed to evoke the sea. Designed by renowned American architect Adam Tihany, whose portfolio includes New York's Spago and Le Cirque, the interior features notes of red, brown and ivory for a warm, intimate vibe."

There is the more recent addition of the Red Room, a plush bar where guests can select from a dazzling range of champagnes and cocktails before proceeding to their repast for the evening.

Fittingly, the restaurant derives its name from Shangri-La Hotel & Resorts Group founder Tan Sri Robert Kuok's love for Chateau Lafite vintages, representing Lafite's commitment to the perfect pairing of good food and wine.

Guiard is the latest in a star-studded procession of culinary masters at Lafite — his predecessors included such industry icons as Frederic Chabert and John Nash. Guiard brings with him over two decades of experience beginning with his training at the prestigious La Rochelle Academy in France to stints at such Michelin-starred restaurants as Bagatelle in Oslo and La Ribaudiere in Bourgneuf-Macé in the heart of the Cognac region.

A flair for creativity underlines his approach, as he takes a palpable joy in combining ingredients and condiments in novel ways. Keeping things fresh, he varies Lafite's menu every three months, preserving a handful of favourites while presenting seasonal specialties.

"When I conceptualise new dishes, I strive to not only capture my memories of France but also focus on recipes that could work outside the country, where ingredients can be hard to find. I try to use as many local ingredients as I can, especially local produce. But there are some ingredients, such as Dover sole and monkfish that just can't be replaced."

His time at Bagatelle in the Norwegian capital had taught him to appreciate the finer nuances of seafood, with a preference for fresh catch. "I miss the four seasons so I try to incorporate them into my work with seasonal ingredients," he admits.

BELOW:
Jean-Philippe Guiard
specialises in classical
French dishes





The restaurant's elegant interior is warmed by notes of red, brown and ivory



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As such, it is no surprise that he has chosen to focus on seafood dishes at Lafite. For the new menu, Guiard has added Pan Seared Fillet of Sea Bream, and brought back an old favourite, the Cauliflower Soup with Maine Lobster and Egg Surprise.

A typical meal at Lafite begins with an amuse bouche that is not found on the menu and based on the chef's whim. During our visit, we are treated to the Fresh Tomato Stuffed with Tomato Mousse served with basil and olive oil sauce. The mousse is both slightly sweet and savoury, and pairs well with the basil's minty accents and peppery finish.

From Lafite's array of entrées of cold appetisers is the Duck Liver Terrine that is now complemented with Red Wine Jelly. Served with warm brioche and balsamic reduction, the terrine is a forcemeat loaf with a texture similar to pate. Admittedly, it is an acquired taste but the pastry does a good job at counteracting its intense flavour.

Guiard says, "The duck liver terrine is piped into rolls of solidified jelly made from port and red wine. The dish is garnished with halved blueberries and served with corn brioche."

The Cauliflower Soup with Maine Lobster and Egg Surprise is served next, a comforting dish with the surprise element of a fluffy

meringue-like concoction floating on the cauliflower cream. Generous chunks of lobster in the silky smooth soup complements the Egg Surprise, which is lightly cooked egg yolk that injects the dish with another layer of delightful flavour.

The main course is a choice between the hearty plate of Pan Seared Fillet of Sea Bream, and Rosemary and Thyme Smoked Rack of Lamb. The Sea Bream is served atop a bed of mashed Ratte potato and Taggiasca olives, with poached oyster and spring vegetables trimmings. The dish is liberally drizzled in a rich lobster consommé, tying its disparate elements together with relish.

As for the lamb, it is sourced from Limousin in the southwest of France, and comes with a salad of grilled zucchini, glazed spring vegetables, new potato and leek gratin. The rosemary and thyme enhance the meat's natural sweetness with their aromatic bouquet.

To round out the meal, Lafite's Praline, Chocolate and Cherry Revised Black Forest is highly recommended, each sinful morsel prepared and presented separately. This sort of arrangement is typical of the establishment — innovative yet steeped in the flavours and traditions of the Old World. ■

1 Praline, Chocolate and Cherry Revised Black Forest

2 A tomato amuse-bouche precedes the meal

3 Rosemary and Thyme Smoked Rack of Lamb