

Table

Specialising in seafood, this unassuming restaurant takes the handling of its ingredients seriously.

Text by Mandy Li, photos by Samantha Sin

Hongkongers love seafood. Right now, it's the season to slurp down jet-fresh oysters and tear apart Yangcheng Lake hairy crab, and many of the city's food lovers are joining in with gusto. But chef Sandy Keung, owner of Table, shakes her head at invitations to partake solely because she's concerned about the hygiene of the seafood.

"Hong Kong relies largely on imported seafood," she says. "While many of us enjoy the flown-in, very few give thought to how they are transported. Take Coffin Bay oysters – it's an eight-hour drive from the farm to the airport, then another four hours for pre-boarding procedures, followed by a long flight to Hong Kong, and finally a four-hour customs check. It can take as long as 40 hours for the bivalve to arrive at your table.

"And while most shellfish are shipped without water in order to save costs, they can only excrete in their own shells. Now, imagine you are devouring an oyster, with the flesh you are also swallowing a lot of unwanted stuff. This is something I find hard to accept. This is why we deurate our seafood here."

Keung worked in the finance industry when she came across an investment opportunity for a deuration system a few years ago and she learned about seafood hygiene. As a food lover and self-taught chef, she invested and opened an online seafood shop. Last year, she went one step further and started Table, a seafood restaurant in Sheung Wan with minimal interior decor to nudge diners to focus on what's on the plate.

With the help of a marine biologist, Keung set up a deuration at her home. The process is not complicated – live seafood is placed in a tank of tap water treated with marine salt and ozone. As the seafood slowly reactivates its metabolism the water becomes murky with its excrement. Once the water is clear again, the shellfish has completed the process. It can take one to three days.

"It's like using a hydrating mask after a long flight so you look glowing and refreshed again," Keung says.

Deurated seafood is not only cleaner, it also tastes sweeter and has a better texture. This gives Keung freedom to cook the seafood in whatever way she likes. Table's seafood-centric menu highlights include *kanjang gejang*, scampi a la plancha, lobster macchiato and molten crab cake. This year, she is also offering raw hairy crab – a delicacy that relies on full confidence in the source.

"This is why we call ourselves ingredient-based cuisine – we care about our ingredients and do not limit ourselves in a particular genre of cooking," Keung says. "This is what we are about." ■



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TABLE



Lobster Macchiato

We were not surprised when lobster soup arrived in a coffee cup topped with a layer of foam. However, we were surprised by what happened next: a sip of the dense, creamy foam imparted a concentrated lobster flavour, with the umami further accentuated by crab roe sprinkled on the surface. Beneath the foam, a thinner, clear lobster soup gave an added dimension to the dish. Some diners describe this soup as "better than sex" – we agree.



Molten Crab Cake

We have eaten a lot of chocolate lava cakes, but this was our first crab version. Mud crab meat is formed into a patty around crab roe, then pan-fried until the roe is half-melted and gooey. It oozed out when we cut it open, which we found amusing. The meat was soft and sweet, and the roe has an agreeable saltiness. We liked the pairing with the slightly sour umeboshi aioli and the creaminess served to balance the cake.



Handmade Egg Noodle with Scampi

The restaurant makes its own noodles daily using two kinds of Italian flour and Japanese eggs. For this pasta, noodles were cooked in chicken stock and butter, and paired with medium-well done scampi. While we loved how the al dente noodles were coated evenly in the sauce, we were more impressed by the size and tenderness of the huge crustacean. With a sprinkle of chilli flakes, we finished the noodles in no time and wanted more.



Iberico Boneless Lamb Leg Medallion

Keung described Iberico lamb as Iberico pork's poor relation – equally good but less well known. Table uses the side of the thigh to capture the two textures of both the front and back muscles in one piece of meat. It was cooked in a vacuum bag for an even temperature, then pan-fried to order. It carried a mild level of gaminess, and was very tender. Kaffir lime sauce added an exotic element to the dish.



Apple Salted Caramel Cake

This four-layer cake has sponge at the bottom, topped with apple chuck, frozen mousse and a thin layer of caramel. We loved the texture of the mousse – somewhere between ice cream and ice pop. Keung dislikes overly sweet desserts, so the cake was paired with chorizo crumble and a small scoop of white miso ice cream for a salty note. We were advised to eat fast before the different elements lost their perfect textures.

BILL

(Dinner for two)

1) Lobster Macchiato	\$198
2) Molten Crab Cake	\$288
3) Handmade Egg Noodle with Scampi	\$248
4) Iberico Boneless Lamb Leg Medallion (6oz)	\$268
5) Apple Salted Caramel Cake	\$98

Total: \$1,100

* Prices and menu subject to change without notice.