



the flavour of genius

THE OLD MASTERS NEVER DIE; THEY DON'T EVEN FADE AWAY. THEIR INFLUENCE WHERE CULINARY MATTERS ARE CONCERNED, LINGER ON EVEN IN PLACES WHERE YOU LEAST EXPECT. AUSTRALIA'S ADOPTED SON CHEONG LIEW ATTEMPTS CARÊME'S MASTERPIECES.

Marie Antoine Carême (1783 - 1833) is feted as being the first celebrity chef. From street-child beginnings in the slums of revolutionary Paris (he was abandoned at ten years old and taken in by a cook before being apprenticed to a pâtissier) to chef of the greatest leaders of the day: Napoleon, King Louis XVIII of France, Tsar Alexander I of Russia, George Prince Regent of England and finally the nouveau riche, James and Betty Rothschild.

A self-taught reader, he spent his precious spare time in the library researching the classical architecture that inspired the elaborate centrepieces ('extraordinaires') for which he became so famous. He is credited with



influencing the foundations of cooking and dining in the modern Western world, including beginning the change from service à la Française, where almost all food was served simultaneously on communal platters, to service à la Russe, where food is served in courses on individual plates. He introduced a military chain of command to commercial kitchens, was one of the first to insist on strict hygiene, invented the stiff chef's toque, as well as dishes seen on French menus throughout the world today, such as vol-au-vents, pithiviers, and piped meringues.

Australia's best-known celebrity chef, Cheong Liew, came to Australia as a student in the late 1960s and started working in restaurants to support his studies. As his interest in cooking grew, he merged the traditions of his Malaysian background with the variety of ethnic influences he found in Australia, finally opening Neddy's in Adelaide in 1975 where, many say, the fusion that is Modern Australian cuisine was born. Both Cheong and Carême are lauded for their respect of produce and their ability to bring the pure flavours of ingredients to the fore. Carême is credited with establishing the model of the master chef who hands down his wisdom and experience



to the next generation of chefs. He did this through his published works, as Cheong has through his time spent teaching at Regency College in Adelaide, and continues to do in his kitchen at The Grange Restaurant in the Adelaide Hilton.

The Adelaide Hilton hosted its second banquet bringing together the geniuses of Cheong Liew and Antoine Carême (in collaboration with gastronome Barbara Santich from the University of Adelaide's Gastronomy programme) with Cheong cooking dishes based on Carême's recipes. A banquet for 100 might have been considered small in Carême's day, but the



days Cheong, his brigade, several of Adelaide's leading pastry chefs and Tim Pak Poy (previously from Claude's restaurant in Sydney), spent labouring over the feast were very much in keeping with the labour that went into a 19th-century French banquet. A long table decorated with all manner of sugar work and pastry extraordinaires dominated the centre of the room. A blue peacock with its plumage fully displayed made entirely from spun sugar was only just overshadowed by a colonnaded Grecian pavilion on a rocky outcrop fashioned from almond paste. Two long tables ran on either side of the room, set with red velvet, crisp white linen, silver candelabras and sparkling glassware. Beside each place, a personal serving spoon rested on its own tray, so each diner could serve themselves from the communal platters.

Service was à la Française, so food arrived in several 'services' rather than courses. Platters containing appetisers of olives, radishes, and canapés of tongue with pickled cherries, and hot entrées of grilled oysters in the shell, pastry cases filled with oysters in cream sauce, fried cheese puffs, game rissoles in brioche, chicken croquettes and whiting sausages adorned the table as guests were seated. These gave way to a rich bisque d'écrivisses (shellfish bisque) served from large tureens at the table.



When this was cleared, the 'Second Service' arrived: saumon à la Rothschild (salmon cooked in champagne, garnished with whiting paupiettes, lobster quenelles, mussels, freshwater crayfish and fried whitebait), concombres à la crème (cucumber cooked in cream with chives and orange zest), and tourte à la financière (large puff pastry shells filled with cockscombs and kidneys, chicken quenelles, lamb sweetbreads, mushrooms and olives).

The 'Third Service' followed. It consisted of ballottine de cailles (boned quail filled with chicken mousse), pigeons à la Marianne (braised pigeons with anchovy and capers), poulet aux huîtres (whole chicken stuffed with oysters) and epaule de mouton farcie aux purées de haricots, de marrons,

Cheong Liew provides the following recipe based on one in *Le Livre de Cuisine* (1867) by Jules Gouffe, who was apprenticed to Carême.

BALLOTTINE DE CAILLES (BONED QUAIL FILLED WITH CHICKEN MOUSSE)

Bone quail and stuff with farce de volaille (recipe follows). Shape into ballotines. Secure, cook (presumably roast or braise) and serve in a croustade with sauce périgueux.

Farce de volaille: grind chicken and bread soaked in chicken stock; season with salt, pepper and a little nutmeg. Bind with some reduced sauce allemande (essence of chicken, essence of mushrooms, and velouté sauce, all reduced, then thickened with egg yolks and a little butter).

Sauce périgueux: cook 300g chopped raw ham (prosciutto-style) with butter, shallots, onion, and pepper until onion is golden and add 20ml Madeira. Reduce, add sauce espagnole, veal stock and truffle essence. Simmer over low heat for 20 minutes, then skim, strain and reduce. Just before serving, add chopped truffle cooked in Madeira.

soubise, garnie de navets glacés et d'épinards (braised stuffed shoulder of hogget with haricot beans, chestnut and onion purée, with glazed turnips and spinach).

It's hard to believe that diners' appetites hadn't flagged by this stage, and certainly everyone was sated, but the services had been well spaced, the excellent French wines had lubricated conversation and everyone had been teased all night by the promise of the dessert centrepieces on the long central table. Dessert Service arrived at the tables—moulded jellies, charlotte Russe, iced chestnut pudding, orange-flower custard, frozen orange and praline parfait, babas with apricot glaze, and the architecturally marvellous croquembouches, served with Pol Roger vintage champagne. The petits fours that accompanied coffee were almost another Dessert Service in themselves—little pots of coffee custard, chocolate macarons, lemon-flavoured almond biscuits, vol-au-vents filled with coffee cream and whipped jelly, sugar-coated apricot tartlets, sponge fingers and cheesecake turnovers.

Guests enjoyed each other's conversation, the champagne and final sweetmeats well into the night. It was an extraordinary glimpse back to an earlier time. Despite the rather elaborate descriptions, it was also intriguing how contemporary many of the dishes still were. The Adelaide Hilton plans to present a Cheong and Carême dinner as a biennial event and I for one look forward to 2006! **WD**



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252 North Bridge Road
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