



A taste for change

Innovative restaurant is back where it all began, writes **Janice Leung Hayes**



Sal To Wing-nin, director of 50-year-old Yixin, believes the name of the restaurant, which is pronounced “yik sun” in Cantonese, comes from an old colloquial saying, “tui chan yik sun”, which means that to forge a way forward, one must leave the old behind.

Yixin opened on Lockhart Road, Wan Chai, in 1963, but the owners and staff had in fact already been operating a restaurant out of a hotel in North Point called Winner House. “When the restaurant opened as an independent entity, I suppose they were looking to start afresh, hence the name,”



Yixin is proud of its hot-smoked pomfret.
Photos: Felix Wong

says To, whose father-in-law Wong Jim-wan founded the original restaurant and Yixin. Wong had worked at The Peninsula hotel before venturing out on his own.

Between 1963 and 2000, there were several Yixin outlets dotted around Hong Kong Island, but in 2000, they were closed due to management issues. A year later, they reopened in Happy Valley, and then Jardine’s Lookout, only to close in 2008.

The owners decided to focus their efforts where it all started: Wan Chai.

While Yixin is rooted in Cantonese cuisine, it is defined by innovation, as the name suggests. One signature dish is the smoked pomfret.

“We have taken some Western techniques and applied them to our style of cooking,” says To. “Smoking is a popular method in the West to prepare fish, such as salmon. Our pomfret is hot-smoked with wood chips and a special sauce. The colour comes from carrot juice. A long time ago, we used food colouring, as that was the norm. It’s very possible that we invented

this dish, or at least no one makes it as well as we do.” It is so popular that the restaurant serves 500 catties of pomfret a month.

Other signatures are the roast duck and lemon chicken, which To offers as an example of why Yixin’s food is “Hong Kong Cantonese”, as the dishes they are most proud of have an East-meets-West flavour.

In recent years, Yixin has focused on preserving its traditions while attracting a new, younger set as Yixin’s clientele are in their 40s to 60s. “We want to tell people that we’re not a dying brand. We’re a Hong Kong classic that grows with the city,” To says.

With that goal, To’s twenty-something son, Derek To Chik-lun, was named the manager and the restaurant’s basement level was recently redesigned to give the atmosphere of a chic private club (it includes a small wine cellar).

“We will keep working on improving on what we can offer,” To says. “Not only do we want to be recognised as a good Chinese restaurant, we want to be recognised as a good restaurant in general.”
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Yixin, Shanghai Industrial Investment Building, 48-62 Hennessy Road, Wan Chai, tel: 2834 9963. Open: 11.30am-11.30pm



I KNOW A PLACE | ANDREW SUN | 48hours@scmp.com

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As a man who has to be in bed far too early, I have become a lunch person. I try to be in bed by 9pm and I’m usually catching up with the day’s news for an hour or so before lights out. That leaves lunch, and I’m discovering I’m pretty good at lunching.

I am happy anywhere as long as the service and food are good. Italian and Japanese are at the top of my list. I still like the hole-in-the-wall dining

that Hong Kong is famous for, especially dumplings and noodles.

After work, I often go to the **Foreign Correspondents’ Club** (2 Lower Albert Road, tel: 2521 1511) for well-priced, dependable food in a great location. I enjoy the chilli con carne, a club classic, as well as the steamed salmon and silken tofu.

Sometimes I go over to **The Chinnery** (1/F Mandarin Oriental, 5 Connaught Road, Central, tel: 2825 4009) for overpriced but very good pub grub and **Giando**

(1/F The Fleet Arcade, 1 Lung King Street, Fenwick Pier, Wan Chai, tel: 2511 8912) for excellent Italian. At The Chinnery, I like the steak and kidney pudding, and bangers and mash. Everything is good at Giando, but be sure to ask for the burrata and tomato.

A guilty pleasure is the set lunch at **Caprice** (Podium 6, Four Seasons Hotel, 8 Finance Street, Central, tel: 3196 8860). Where else can you get three-star Michelin

food at a reasonable price? And if you don’t have to get back to work, the wine list is spectacular.

Outside Hong Kong, I am spending more time in Melbourne these days as I have a daughter at boarding school. I make it a point to have breakfast at the **Duchess of Spotswood** (+61 3 9391 6016) in Yarraville, which serves possibly the best breakfast in the world. In Tasmania, where my parents live in Ulverstone, I am always at **Pedro’s** (+61 3 6425 6663) for fish and chips. And in London, it’s **The Red Fort** (+44 20 7437 2525) in Soho for Indian food.

