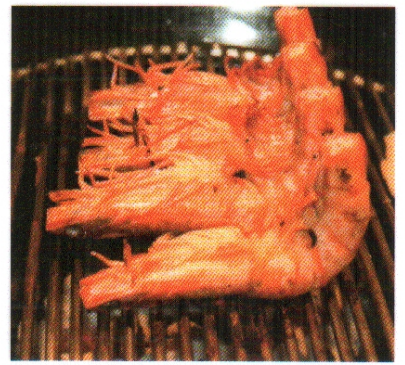


Da On

An indoor barbecue with a twist. We emerge delightfully unscathed.



I'm conservative about food. I believe the only edible part of a land, sea or airborne creature is the fleshy exterior, and I'm not talking about the backside. Nor do I mean the head, feet or nether regions. And God forbid livers, hearts and intestines. In fact, if it were up to me, animals would consist mainly of drumsticks. And maybe a wing or two.

Like I said, I'm conservative. So imagine my recent horror at a Korean fine-diner, where I was presented with, of all things - ox-tongue.

For a neophyte like me, the interior wouldn't have aroused suspicion. Da On seduces with a minimalist, yet stately décor. Tables proceed in an orderly fashion down the long dining hall, couched at both ends by expansive sofas. Along the sides are individually decorated private rooms - colourful Oriental canvasses, harmonizing lattice-work, regal colonnades. And wafting down like gentle snow, Enya's ethereal warbling soothes away initial fears.

I stared at the impossibly thin slices of ox-tongue, curling like flowers over charcoal-inspired heat. I was about to French-kiss a cow. With heavy metal chopsticks, I placed one in my mouth. Surprisingly, instead of the expected slime and jelly-like ickiness, it was firm, yet soft flesh that greeted my tingling tongue. There was no lingering unpleasant taste or smell either, and I swallowed with relief. The stuff was actually good! I placed another in my mouth.

The meal then proceeded at a brisk pace. A typical Korean barbecue serves up plenty of beef, seafood, poultry and even lamb thrown in for good measure. No surprises there, thankfully. What's surprising however, is that they barbecue indoors, and Da On manages this rather artfully indeed. No dramatic, smoke-filled interior. No sweaty chef frantically fanning a charred grill with makeshift cardboard.

Instead, on wavy chairs and tatami floors, diners gather around specially out-fitted tables. In the centre sits the steely barbecue grill, glowing quietly. The twist lies in the vacuum-like action of the grill,

which sucks in the surrounding air. The effect is two-fold; the gentle suction keeps the embers alive, whilst preventing smoke from escaping and barbecuing our faces as well.

With that little mystery resolved, we proceeded to tuck in heartily. A waiter watched over our barbecue while we prodded at the cold side-dishes, of which there were no less than ten. The mashed potato was sweet and fluffy, the fish cakes fresh, and anchovies in Korean soy sauce danced delightfully. There was of course the famous kimchi, a sour, face-contorting delicacy.

Then came the US Black Angus Beef. Un-marinated and suitably marbled, the meat proved smoky, juicy and soft. The all-natural marinade in the ribs and sirloin too was equally impressive, juicy with the mild fruity sweetness of pear and apple. Firm scallops rounded off the mains, but not before an assembly of Tiger Prawns blushed beneath our greedy gaze.

The magic grill at Da On however had one final trick up its sleeve. It wasn't Shih Kye, a cold fermented rice beverage that hinted sweetly

of barley. It wasn't Bak Se Ju, a Korean wine made of 12 herbs which we still fantasize about. No, the miracle happened when the owner offered us a cigarette.

"What???", we exclaimed, thinking she was joking. "No I'm not. The grill also doubles as an ashtray, and sucks in the smoke. Other diners will not be affected", she elaborated. It was music to our ears. So there we were, in a fine-dining outlet on the hallowed 6th floor of Pavilion, giggling like teenagers, and blowing gentle kisses at the magic grill.

It was a moment worthy of a toast. As they say in Korean - Wihayer!

A portion of meat (4 people) costs RM65 - RM69 (about 4 portions necessary for a full meal).

Da On
Lot 6.40.00, Level 6 Pavilion,
Kuala Lumpur.
Tel: 03-2141 2100/3100
Opens 11am - 10pm daily.