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Saturday October 11, 2008

The Korean Wave refined

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Da On's fine Korean cuisine with unexpectedly modern twists will sweep you off your feet.

By ALICE CHING

Fancy a mildly spiced Kim Chi Ice-cream anyone? How about Mul Naeng Myeon (Cold Noodles) - chewy, thread-thin buckwheat noodles in sweet, hearty beef stock with apple slices, pear,hardboiled egg, sliced beef, radish and cucumber?

Once you have sampled these unique specialities at Da On - a fine-dining Korean restaurant at the Pavilion KL, you will understand why so many Malaysians have been swept up by *Hallyu* or the Korean wave. Never mind if you have not watched a single episode of *Winter Sonata* and don't know who Rain is.



Ready for the grill: Assorted Barbeque or Mo Dum Gui from Da On Fine Korean Restaurant.

According to restaurant owner Lee Nan Kyoung, the name Da On means "may all the goodwill and fortune come your way" in Korean. Although this is her first restaurant venture, Lee is no stranger to the industry as some of her relatives are successful restaurateurs in South Korea.

"Most Korean eateries here concentrate on families and are mid-priced. Da On is different - I want to present the modern facets of Korean cuisine, from the interior concept and refined service to its contemporary food presentation. The cuisine remains authentic."

From its main entrance, the outlet's minimalist décor and stark foyer give little

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indication of what to expect. Once you enter and walk down the narrow pathway, you arrive at a spacious and elegantly furnished dining area. Tucked away discreetly are five tastefully decorated private dining rooms which are popular with Da On's varied clientele.

Lee shows us the most outstanding feature of her restaurant - a well-concealed, ultra-powerful ventilation and suction system that noiselessly disposes of smoke fumes from the sleek barbecue hot plates ensconced within the dining tables.

"This ensures our guests don't need to worry about food odour clinging to their hair and clothes," Lee says.

Lee recommends a cold appetiser like Jap Chae. The velvety smoothness of sweet potato noodles combined with carrot strips, wood ear fungus and spinach in a light dressing of soya sauce, sesame oil and pepper is an invigorating starter.



Start small: Lovely selection of Ban Chan, or appetisers

"Diners should also try Ban Chan, an assortment of Korean appetisers such as Cucumber Kim Chi, Deep-fried Zucchini Slices in Egg Batter, Fermented Black Beans in a Sticky Sweet Sauce, Seaweed Pickles, Sautéed Beansprouts, Radish Slices in Wasabi Sauce and Stir-fried Spinach, among others," says Lee.

"Our selection varies according to the availability of seasonal ingredients."

The Assorted Barbecue or Mo Dum Gui (RM180 for two) is a must-have, especially the marinated sirloin. Tender and moist, the meat is tasty, thanks to its natural juices and minced garlic marinade. Those who don't feel like lifting a finger can get the staff to grill the Angus beef slices, prawn, scallop, ox tongue, ribs, pine tree mushroom, garlic, onion and shiitake for them.



Cosy setting: The restaurant's dining area.

Lee says: "We usually wrap the grilled morsels in fresh lettuce leaves, smeared with Doen Jang (fermented red miso paste) and raw garlic slices. You can also dip the meat into a concoction of sesame oil, sea salt, pepper and sesame seeds."

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After four hours of painstaking preparation, the sweet, wholesome goodness of the Sam Gae Tang or Ginseng Chicken Soup (RM40) is clearly evident at first sip. We also made short work of the chicken which is stuffed with glutinous rice and ginkgo.

Complete your meal on a high note with soupy Mul Naeng Myeon (Cold Noodles) or Bibim Mul Naeng Myeon, the dry version served with Korean chilli sauce.

Da On also serves Korean beer, rice wines, wines and spirits to complement your culinary experience. One of the best is Baek Se Ju or "100-year-wine" brewed from 12 kinds of herbs like ginger, wolfberries and ginseng. Its name denotes longevity as the wine helps to enhance blood circulation.

Equally outstanding is Seol Jung Mae (winter plum wine with gold flecks) which was traditionally drunk by Korean empresses to preserve their beautiful complexion. Other distinctive tipples include Sweet Potato Shoju - the Korean equivalent of vodka, Bokbunjajoo (raspberry wine) and Sansachun (haw fruit wine).

So let Da On sweep you away with its contemporary ambience, cordial service and sumptuous specialities.



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