

Food Journal Entries

Hollandse Stamppot

19/04/2024



The stamppot is likely the best-known traditional Dutch dish, second only to bitterballen.

On the plate was a smoked sausage and a large beef meatball, sitting on a bed of mashed potatoes incorporated with spinach, surrounded by a moat of a brothy gravy - a gorgeous plating.

The sausage was sautéed to a beautiful crisp but not overdone. The outer skin was thick enough to audibly crackle when bitten, but thin enough that the resistance didn't encourage the sausage to disintegrate after one bite. The meat was firm but not chewy, and its smokiness melded well with the rest of the dish.

With its large size and delicate texture, the beef meatball barely held itself together. The non-uniform sizes of the bits were indicative of a handmade mince. It was not overly compressed, which allowed the broth to penetrate the voids of the meatball while cooking, imbuing it with flavour while keeping it moist.

The slight sweetness of mellow onions and the subtle sharpness of turnips/radishes (I'm not sure) within the mash provided heterogeneity, while the gravy kept everything warm throughout.

One can hardly ask for a heartier meal for a cold winter day than this balanced and satisfying stamppot.

(200 words)

Shrimps Risotto

09/05/2024



When in Rome, do as the Romans do, except not in this case because risotto wasn't invented until a millennia after the Roman Empire fell.

Anyhow, I had shrimps risotto for the primo of this meal. Despite the dish's name, crab and lobster were the more prominent crustaceans. While there wasn't much meat, I could still taste the ocean in the sauce; it was creamy and rich, thick enough to cling firmly onto the rice, which was cooked al dente with each grain distinct. The bits of meat present were slightly overcooked, though sweet. The garnish of parsley allowed an occasional herbal note to sneak through the umami, further elevating the flavour profile.

The one thing I felt missing was a touch of acidity. A dish as creamy and flavourful as this could use a splash of sharpness to cut through the richness - a squeeze of lime, perhaps, lest it becomes too heavy, as was the case towards the second half.

Another complaint was the inclusion of crab claws. As decorative elements on the side? Sure. But I regard it an absolute sin to bury inedible things among a dish.

Despite the minor shortcomings, I thoroughly enjoyed the dish.

(200 words)

Beef Wellington

17/06/2024



It was my last, and coincidentally, my friend's first week in the UK, and we spontaneously decided to splurge on a (£195!) meal at Gordon Ramsay's Bread Street Kitchen.

After the appetisers, we had the famous beef Wellington with a red wine jus and mashed potatoes for our main. The tenderloin's doneness was unlike anything I'd witnessed since there was barely any grey meat. It was done medium-rare, but its softness resembled that of a rare steak. The uniformity in colour suggested it's probably cooked sous vide. The crepes were too thin to notice or taste, and the puff pastry was buttery yet not so flaky it'd crumble easily. The acidic jus introduced some sharpness but ultimately made little difference.

Inexplicably missing was the prosciutto, whose saltiness was meant to contrast the criminally under-seasoned beef; its absence highlighted the beef's blandness, especially towards the centre. The truffles in the duxelles were dominating. Between their richness and the pastry's heaviness, it was challenging to enjoy more than a forkful at a time, necessitating frequent sips of drinks between bites.

While the meal was passable, the beef's under-seasoning and the truffles' excessive richness proved to be sizeable setbacks, painting it regrettably lacklustre.

(200 words)

Reflective Summary

Thus concludes my food journey in Europe, where I had the pleasure of tasting some of the most iconic dishes in the world; it was not easy to choose only three to write about. Retracing my gustatory memories while racking my brain for (hopefully) expressive vocabulary and culinary knowledge made me realise I know more about food than I'm aware; a most thought-provoking exercise indeed. I'm also said to be picky about food, which likely helped me be more critical of the nuances of some dishes.

The backstory to these meals is that I was an exchange student in London and took the opportunity to also travel around Europe. Though I don't usually enjoy travelling, Amsterdam and Rome are worth another visit, if just for their food alone. As a sucker for western, particularly Italian, cuisine, one could imagine my delight in the gastronomic paradise that is Rome. I was spoiled for choice with all their pasta dishes. I also attempted their traditional five- (or more, depending on who you ask) course meal structure, but I had to call it quits after only the primo and secondo.

It's nigh impossible not to compare the food in Europe with that in Hong Kong. I'd say we replicate many European dishes well despite the authentic versions being a high bar. Being in Europe made me reflect on the extensive size and variety of menus back home since the entire catalogue of some restaurants could easily be just one section of a menu in Hong Kong. It's only when you stop seeing them that you realise the plenitude of fusion dishes we have isn't the norm, and it made me thankful that the creativity of Hong Kong people, along with various historical factors, culminates so perfectly and beautifully to form this fusion heaven.

(300 words)