



Knack for Snack Nico's Spuntino Bar & Restaurant

小食故事

By Jane Ram

High summer is the season for sharp, bright flavors and light ingredients. Food must look sufficiently interesting on the menu and on the plate to tempt jaded appetites. All these requirements make Italian cooking just right for this time of year, especially when it is as focused as at newly opened Nico's Spuntino Bar & Restaurant on Elgin Street, part of the enterprising and successful Staunton's Group.

Spuntino literally translates as "snack" and many of the dishes are ideal for sharing as accompaniments to a convivial glass of the wide range of Italian and international

wines that form the backbone of the drinks list. Look for the rarely seen labels from Sardinia and Sicily. And if a little digestif is called for, Grappa and Italian brandy are all available.

Most Italian restaurants in Hong Kong offer a generic and regrettably samey range of dishes. But at Nico's you can enjoy specialities from southern Italy: Sardinian roasted lamb and suckling pig, Sicilian seafood and water buffalo mozzarella from Campania are the more unusual stars alongside regional variations on staple pizzas and pastas.

Nico's is designed to be a destination for all hours. The inviting open-fronted bar area is already proving a popular addition to a district that is not exactly short of enticing watering holes. And for those in search of serious food the dining area has an appealing rustic ambience that convinces you to try something new. Fancy an Espresso or an ice-cream? An afternoon pot of tea and a cake? Welcome to the friendly and airy café that is Nico's by day. And of course the dozens of premium brand ice cream flavours make the perfect ending to a delicious meal. Can't decide what to try? Ask to sample anything that sounds or looks intriguing.

It will be quite a list! Premium I-Scream Gelato at \$30 per scoop.

On a visit soon after the official opening we were eight at the table which enabled us to try a wide range of the most alluring sounding Spuntini. Forget the usual rubbery processed mozzarella and dive into fresh buffalo mozzarella for texture and taste sensations that linger in the memory. The silky outer skin is just firm enough to hold the creamy contents in place, but once it is cut open, this provides a tasting experience like no other.

Without the mozzarella, my favorite appetizer would probably have been the cured fish platter, although the ham and cheese potato croquettes would be a close runner-up. Incidentally, although I did not try it on this visit, Nico's is one of few places in Hong Kong with crocodile meat on the menu - breaded and fried crisp as an alternative to calamari, prawns, capelin or oyster.

Pizza of course is a must and the stone-baked crisp, pulled version was readily sliced for sharing. We tried the chef's Mamma Assunta version, a

classic tomato, cheese, with fresh pork sausage and white mushroom, named after a childhood friend, and also the Four Seasons which had a three cheese base and was topped with colourful red chicory and pungent gorgonzola for good measure.

The size was so generous that a single beef and pork filled tortellini with an aromatic sauce of tomato and basil made a substantial portion. So much so that the much of the delicious risotto languished in the dish. In Hong Kong it is all too rare to find risotto that has been cooked to perfection like this one. Made with



artichokes and pork cheek, garnished with a parmesan waffle, this was almost irresistible. But prudence ruled as I knew that some very special dishes were still ahead of us.

It soon became clear that I was right to hold back: the restaurant ages its meat in-house to get it just right and the Porterhouse T-bone steak almost fell off the bone. Served with a simple red wine reduction sauce and accompanied by rosemary roasted potatoes, it looked and tasted sensational. Customers can order their meat cut to size, starting with 350 grams. According to Stephen Wright, Staunton's director, one customer ordered a 1.4 kilogram steak and picked it clean!

The hardest dish from the technical point of view is the roasted suckling pig. There's a lot of competition for the honours, but Nico's can be ranked up there with the best. The bed of roasted myrtle sprigs add a distinctive southern Italian twist.

Fresh seasonal produce will be a major feature of Nico's menu. As special seafood and cheeses become available, they will be introduced into the menu. The place opened its doors in June and already there are plans to feature chestnuts in September and white truffles in October–November.

The distinctive regional focus at Nico's shows the way forward for Italian food

in Hong Kong. Doubtless we will soon see more regional Italian cuisine on all sides, which will delight serious foodies.

Dolce are as inventive as everything else at Nico's. I passed on the delicious sounding crepes and the Tiramisu, but had tasting samples of some of the most interesting sounding gelato flavours. And I did try the delectable signature "cuban cigar" made principally from toasted hazelnuts: I restrained myself from dipping it into the accompanying glass of Zibibbo digestif.

盛夏时节的食材大多滋味鲜明、口味清淡，菜单上的食物必须丰盛才能唤醒倦怠的味蕾。而这一切正是意大利美食所具备的，因此也成为这个季节的首选。位



于香港伊利近街的Nico's Spuntino Bar & Restaurant新近开业，为这个夏天带来别样南意风情。

在意大利语中“Spuntino”的意思是“小食”，这样的食物适合与大家一起分享，并且能够与来自意大利以及世界其他地方的葡萄酒形成完美的搭配。来自撒丁岛和西西里岛的葡萄酒很是少见，如果需要餐后酒，格拉巴酒和意大利白兰地也是不错的选择。

香港的大多数意大利餐厅提供的菜品多为种类相似，缺乏变化。但在Nico，你可以享受来自意大利南部的特色美食：撒丁烤羊腿和乳猪、西西里海鲜和卡帕尼亚的水

牛马苏里拉奶酪，当然披萨和意大利面也必不可缺。

无论何时去Nico都不会让你失望。开放式的酒吧为这一繁华地区又带来一处大受欢迎的娱乐地。对于那些美食爱好者来说，这里引人入胜的田园气息让你禁不住想尝试各种新鲜事物。香醇的浓缩咖啡、冰淇淋、下午茶、蛋糕小点，这就是温馨宜人的Nico。不能错过这里的优质冰淇淋，绝对是完美的落幕之笔。优质I-Scream Gelato冰淇淋每勺30港币。

在餐厅正式开业时，我们一行8人应邀前去品尝Nico无比诱人的意式小食。新鲜

的水牛马苏里拉奶酪让你忘却寻常口感，带来细腻的质地和口感，令人难以忘怀。如丝绸般的外壳包裹着乳脂丰富的内在，一旦切开立刻让你沉浸于无与伦比的体验中。

如果没有马苏里拉，我最喜欢的开胃菜大约是熏鱼拼盘，其次就是火腿和奶酪炸马铃薯肉饼。虽然此行我并没有品尝到鳄鱼肉，不过Nico是香港少数几家有供应鳄鱼肉的餐厅，做法类似炸鱿鱼、对虾、毛鳞鱼或生蚝相近。

披萨肯定要尝试，在石头上烤到清脆，成品已经被切分好。厨师Mamma Assunta的披萨使用传统的西红柿、奶酪、新鲜猪肉肠、白蘑菇，名字来自于儿时的好友，这款披萨以3种奶酪为底，其上色彩缤纷的红菊苣和辛辣的戈尔根朱勒干酪。

牛肉和猪肉馅的意大利饺子个头巨大，搭配芳香的西红柿酱和罗勒，非常实惠，以至于意大利调味饭不得被冷落。在香港，很难见到如此完美的意大利调味饭。选用朝鲜蓟和猪脸颊肉，以帕玛森华夫点缀，让人难以抗拒。不过我仍旧保持谨慎的态度，因为还有更加特别的菜品在等着我们。

很快便证明我的决定完全正确，餐厅的带骨牛排，肉可脱骨，搭配简单的红葡萄酒酱汁，佐以烤土豆配迷迭香，色香味俱全。客人可以选择适合自己大小的肉块，从350克起。据Staunton的总监Stephen Wright称，1个客人曾经点了1.4公斤牛排，而且吃得一点没剩。

从技术的角度来说，难度最高的菜应该是烤乳猪。关于这道菜有很多的竞赛，Nico足够名列前茅。烤制用的香桃木为这款南意创意菜带来与众不同之处。

新鲜的时令菜品是Nico菜单上的主角。当特定的海鲜和奶酪上市时，餐厅也会将其引入菜单。Nico在6月开业，不过已经计划在9月推出坚果、10月到11月推出白松露。

Nico带有明显的地域特色，它将这些极具风味的美食带到香港，无疑我们很快将会看到越来越多的正宗意大利地区美食。

与Nico一样，Dolce同样极具创意。虽然我没有品尝美味的法式薄饼和提拉米苏，但是其中一些冰淇淋让人同样记忆深刻。我还尝试了美味的招牌菜“古巴雪茄”——由烤制的坚果制成，这道菜让我爱不释手，幸好泽波比餐后酒将我从中拯救。