

A jewelled ring, a Panama hat and a cane

The popular and squarely discredited story about the origin of the Crêpe Suzette has it that a clumsy French waiter, named by different sources Henri Charpentier or Chartenier, invented the dish in the late 1800s when he slipped up and set a chafing vessel full of cordials on fire. The alcohol quickly evaporated from this impromptu flambé, providently leaving behind a viscous sauce with a “delicious melody of sweet flavours”.

According to Charpentier’s memoirs, this happy accident occurred just as he was about to serve up a plate of pancakes for the Prince of Wales’ dessert. The Prince, who would go onto become England’s King Edward VII, was purportedly visiting Monte Carlo at the time, dining out — so goes History’s slanderous whisper — with a young lady of unknown parentage named Suzette (judging from her far-reaching influence on culinary history, Ms. Suzette must have been an exceedingly pretty lady indeed).

The lucky waiter claims to have been gifted “a jewelled ring, a Panama hat and a cane” by the Prince for his troubles. The trouble with this story is its inherent bias — Charpentier is its only teller. More reliable sources such as the *Larousse Gastronomique* and *Le Menagier de Paris* contend that crêpes, including perhaps the famous Crêpe Suzette, have been around in France since Medieval times, while some learned foodies even trace their origin all the way back to the early Romans.

These thin dosa-like pancakes, generally made from eggs, flour and milk, are so simple to prepare and satisfying to the palate that they have always been a popular food in Europe across regions and classes. They can be served as hors d’oeuvres, entrées or desserts; salty or sweet; and with a variety of fillings — a versatility that seems to have appealed much to Ranjit Roychoudhury, sous chef with the Taj West End, so much that he curated an entire food festival dedicated to the humble crêpe last week at Mynt. *Expresso* caught up with the fest, aptly named ‘All Filled Up’, just as it was winding down. In time for a late lunch, we were shown to a table on the porch overlooking the 111-year old West End’s lawn.

Our involved four-course meal began with a plate of leek and mushroom pancakes set atop Asian-spiced beetroot and yellow pepper vinaigrette. The leek and mushroom stuffing for the crêpes was cooked in a rather ordinary white sauce, a study in textbook blandness that, when detailed with the honeyed beetroot flavoured in fresh Indian spices like star anise and cloves, took an unexpectedly Dickensian twist. This was followed by a plate of spinach crêpes doused in cauliflower soup, which was about as surprising as an unfulfilled election promise.

The main course consisted of two dishes, one vegetarian and one piscetarian - Roma tomato crêpes encased in spinach and American corn served with sage-enhanced mascarpone cream sauce, and Norwegian smoked salmon crêpes with capers, dill and Smetana. Both of these were decent, but didn't come close to the epiphanic brilliance of the starter. The real competition there was the dessert, a traditional Crêpe Suzette served with orange sauce and Grand Marnier, uplifted by an inspired dollop of crème Chantilly.

Chef Ranjit, on request, agreed to part with his recipe for the starter that we liked so much:

Leeks and mushroom pancakes atop Asian spiced beetroot, yellow pepper vinaigrette

Ingredients

For the crepes:

Flour 100gm

Eggs 2nos.

Milk 30ml

Aerated water 15ml

Salt 5gm

For the leek and mushroom mix:

Leeks 50gm

Button mushrooms 90gm

Fresh thyme 5gm

Chopped garlic 10gm

Heavy cream 20ml

Parmesan cheese 10gm

Salt 5gm

Black pepper 4gm

For the Asian-spiced beetroot

Diced beetroot 100gm

Whole peeled garlic 20gm

Olive oil 10ml

Fresh tarragon 7gm

Star anise 3gm

Cloves 3gm

Honey 15ml

Pepperoncini 12gm

For the yellow pepper vinaigrette:

Yellow pepper 2nos.

Oil 30ml
Honey 5ml

Method:

Make a batter for the crêpes, mixing all the ingredients. Heat oil, sauté garlic and add leeks. Keep adding mushrooms till all the water has evaporated. Add cream and reduce. Finish with Parmesan cheese.

Next, bake the beetroot with herbs and garlic till it becomes tender. Cook it with honey, pepperoncini, star anise and cloves. Cook till tender. Remove the outer skin of the yellow pepper and purée with oil, and add honey while finishing.

Finally, plating it: put the beetroot mix on the plate first as a base. Stuff the leek mix into the crêpes and place them over the beetroot base. Drizzle some vinaigrette dressing on the dish, and serve.

Written for *Espresso*

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