

# A 'Franck' approach to dining

**Aubrey Buckingham**

**T**he restaurant business is a funny little industry. It is almost impossible to predict what will work and what won't, and there are few and far between who can claim to put their finger on the pulse of the finicky masses.

This city has seen its fair share of hits and misses, some deserved, some not so. Hugo saw a lot of money thrown at it but ultimately lost its nerve and undid the fine work its chef was originally doing. The Xintiandi north block spot continues to be cursed, with The Collection its latest victim.

After George Chen's brave attempt previously with Shikumen Bistro also failed to shine, one would have thought the outrageously-priced space was a no-go zone. Similarly, the Naked Cow is also fizzling a la its previous occupant, Zin, and should the flames go out, restaurateurs may be reluctant

to do business there again.

Likewise, if Brad Turley's new Mexican venture, opening on August 10, shines, how does that explain what happened to Zoco or even Maneo? Pier One's Mimosa was a great concept and chef Stefan Stiller's fare was nothing short of spectacular; its collapse was perhaps a lesson in foodies' unwillingness to travel out of their neighborhoods.

Sometimes it doesn't take an elaborate concept to get the punters coming back. Not everyone fully grasps intricate food philosophies and the same people who complain about not having a good meal at Jade on 36 are likely to be the same folk who see an all-you-can-eat teppanyaki joint as the ideal diner for a night out.

Of course any business needs patrons, and even a simple concept must cater to a broad enough spectrum of tastes. Frenchman Franck Pecol, whose many hats also included that of nightclub DJ, has brought a chic, up-market bistro to the city, and



Chacuterie served by French chef Franck Pecol

has racked up solid success with the culinary equivalent of a no-brainer.

The self-named bistro is a small, intimate space with dim lights that flatter and tables close enough together that you lean in to chat. The sensuous surroundings do their best to hint at the possibility that dessert may not be the last course of the evening, while the prints of legendary chefs on the wall remind guests that food is

very much at the forefront of Pecol's mind. Not very subtle but this is Shanghai after all.

The Frenchman is often on the floor himself, chatting with guests, taking orders and even serving. Some patrons have complained of his snootiness, but at the end of the day it's his place, he can do what he wants.

The wine list is mostly from Provence, which suits the fare fine. A tidy option is being able to order carafes, so the unfortunate markups hurt less. A focused list, and one that works.

The food menu is similarly tight; soups, salads, meat, voila. There is great

attention to detail here, and the menu boards are written clearly and succinctly, albeit in French.

Pecol has trained his local staff well enough to engage the customers and explain the various dishes. The lad even seemed slightly embarrassed to

reveal the buffalo mozzarella (100 yuan) was from Italy.

The charcuterie is cut to order, and the various assorted platters are enough for two. Slightly fazed by the options, we favored the assorted cuts with cheese (190 yuan) over the foie gras terrine (190 yuan).

The saltiness and fat on the ham made for perfect bedfellows, and while I don't profess to be an expert about cheese, the selection provided for a well-wrought trio of flavors and textures across the spectrum of ripeness.

The grilled sea bass (180 yuan) was delightful with

the first bite – a cacophony of farmed ocean flavor cooked delicately and with flair. The seafood risotto base, however, was less stellar and proved to be a jarring texture.

The lamb loins (190 yuan) was a lovely dish, simply presented and similarly prepared with love. Cooked right, the meat gave a solid bite but rewarded with a grassy herbaceousness more commonly associated with wine.

Dessert was a simple lime sorbet, which not only cleansed the palate after such strong flavors but aided with digestion. The complimentary shot of watermelon liqueur also worked to similar effect.

The food at Franck may not be completely refined but it's more upmarket than others in the category. The serene Ferguson Lane is also the ideal location, while the straightforward decor suits the fare.

Franck is certainly worth the repeat visit, and could be the ideal date restaurant for those looking for "coffee" to follow. Reservations are recommended.

Address: 376 Wukang Road  
Tel: 6437-6465

Set Lunch cost 68 RMB Only  
A choice of Start  
and Main Course or Two Toppings