

CULINARY INTEGRATION



CHEF YOSHIHARU KAJI OF FELIX AT THE PENINSULA



PHILIPPE ORRICO, EXECUTIVE CHEF, HULLETT HOUSE

With Asian elements in European dishes, and French touches in Cantonese food, chefs increasingly seem to borrow ingredients from cuisines other than those they serve.

Philippe Orrico, executive chef of Hullett House, is one of those using ingredients from around the world, such as soy sauce, coconut milk and Indian spices, in his French cuisine. For Orrico this is a result of having grown up on the island of Réunion, which is home to five main cuisines: French, Indian, Sri Lankan, Cantonese and Creole.

The French chef has only just begun to understand how he has been inspired by his mixed background. He says: "I didn't realise until recently the influence my background had had upon me as a chef, or that for me it is quite natural to use ingredients from around the world in my French cuisine."

The epiphany came at St George, where he was explaining to a diner the dish of roasted French squab, shiitake with piquillos, baby carrot, eggplant and nora paste. "I realised during the explanation how my food has evolved in the past year, and that this dish is me on a

plate," Orrico says. "It is a mix of communities, but it tastes French, this is my cuisine."

Included in the dish are the French-Indian spice blend vadouvan that includes cardamom, eggplant confit cooked in a Sicilian style, Moroccan dates, nora and piquillo chillies from Spain, and mushrooms, soy sauce, lemongrass and ginger from Asia. Asian ingredients including jasmine rice, coconut milk and soy sauce, also feature in the Lozère lamb saddle dish.

Often used to add complexity and depth to a dish, the non-French ingredients are mostly undetectable by diners. For example, lemongrass is used in such a way that it adds a fragrant citrus element to a dish without it tasting Thai.

To ensure that his cuisine has a clear French identity, Orrico says it is a matter of ownership. "I don't borrow ingredients from other cuisines, I steal them," he says. "For me to borrow is to copy and this is fake, to steal is to make it your own and this is how my cuisine remains French, which is the only cuisine I know how to cook."

Other chefs prefer to think of it as borrowing, something which is not new in Hong Kong.

