



I would complain about the wrong bill, but if I don't like the experience I just don't go back

PAUL SEAMAN, PR PROFESSIONAL

slightly I don't really care since the flavour of the meat is enhanced."

That's a view that Cheng shares. "I would only say something if it is an expensive steak and it's terribly cooked with a big temperature difference; say, it was ordered medium rare and it came out medium well done."

Restaurants respond to complaints differently. Some simply apologise; others may offer a replacement dish or a complimentary dessert or glass of wine, which is what happened to Jackson after she complained about the long wait. "I was just finishing a glass of champagne when a second arrived, on the house, as an apology."

Complaining about wine is appropriate in etiquette terms for certain transgressions, says Jackson. These include serving wine at the wrong temperature, filling glasses too full, or refilling too quickly with the aim of asking if you would like another bottle. Jackson feels it is also

appropriate to complain if staff recommend a wine that is over your specified budget, or push you to drink a different coloured wine because they may feel they know better than you. Chaney says he would let the staff know their recommendation did not work, but would also "smile and drink it regardless".

Replacing a corked or spoiled wine is a given, but what if a wine is simply not to the diner's taste? "If a waiter recommends a wine the best approach is to let the customer try it and replace it with something else if it is not to their taste," says Seaman.

Jackson says different restaurants have different policies on this.

"I feel that if the customer says there's something wrong with the wine, or that they don't like it, the restaurant should take it back." At the same time, she believes diners should be careful when ordering. "Wine experimentation is, perhaps, for home and not the restaurant." foodandwine@scmp.com

BLOGGERS BITE BACK

Ale Wilkinson, thedimsumdiaries.com

If something isn't quite right, I think it's absolutely vital to complain; if nothing is said about it then how will the restaurant learn from its mistakes and not repeat them?

I try to give constructive criticism where possible but I don't let it go by unspoken. This also applies to my writing. I write honestly - there's no point praising a place that will disappoint readers when they try it.

I am courteous and will indicate the good points that hopefully outweigh the bad. At one private kitchen I went to, I found the prices too high and the service uncomfortable, yet the food was absolutely delicious.

I wrote exactly this and unfortunately received a fairly abusive e-mail in response from the chef, which made me want to delete the good comments. I replied with an explanation, but she was still unhappy and sent me another rude e-mail. The aim of the complaint is to critique the restaurant so it can learn from this and better serve its future customers, not to hurt anyone's feelings.

Peter Chang, diarygrowingboy.com

I complain if I have a bad meal in a restaurant that I go to regularly or one that I would like to go back to. If the food or service is so horrible that I feel the place is beyond salvation, or it clearly doesn't care about its customers, then I don't bother to complain. I just never return.

If I complain directly, I try to make sure that I do so politely, without getting too emotional. Recently a Spanish restaurant failed so miserably that I was never going back - so there was no point telling them. My review was rather scathing and prompted the co-owner to message me and post on my Facebook page.

The opposite occurred in a Michelin-star restaurant in France. When the chef asked me how my meal was, I said everything was perfect except I thought the langoustine could have been fresher. He disagreed, but he took the dish off the bill. That is service. I think the view that it is disrespectful to the chef to complain is nonsense. For me, a restaurant that serves food that is below my expectations or tasteless is disrespectful to me, the customer.