

Writer Vicki Williams

Eating Long Term

Chefs respond to increased attention on eating what's good for us – and the environment – with all-encompassing approaches to sustainability



The introduction of the Sustainable Restaurant Award by The World's 50 Best Restaurants, a powerful influencer, cemented Comprehensive sustainability fine dining as a goal in 2013. The Sustainable Restaurant Association rates restaurants across three main aspects – sourcing, environment and society – and annually awards it to the restaurant demonstrating the highest environmental and social responsibility.

This award is the only one in which restaurants in the 50 Best and 51–100 list are able to self-nominate. Two-Michelin-starred Amber in Hong Kong has nominated

itself each year, and Richard Ekkebus, culinary director at The Landmark Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong, is passionate about sustainability in all its forms, which goes beyond just sourcing ingredients. He says, "It's an issue I feel very strongly about as a chef, parent and Hong Kong citizen. One mission is to continue working towards reducing plastic considerably in our operations. The entire hotel has focused on this for the past year, and the amazing thing is that you do not have to look far to find perfect alternative materials made from compostable plants."

On the product side, Ekkebus is a

pioneer. He says, "Sustainable seafood was one of the first areas we focused on 12 years ago given Hong Kong's high consumption. In 2008, we began creating sustainable seafood menus. Now, all the seafood we use is from suppliers who harvest using sustainable techniques. In addition, we respect a sustainable fishing calendar whereby we only purchase fish when they are not carrying eggs."

Ekkebus goes on to list the numerous other ways in which sustainability is being prioritised, including buying local, filtering and bottling their own water and composting food waste. He says, "Our aim is to provide guests with the finest dining while protecting the future of our fish, suppliers and business."

This all-encompassing commitment to sustainability is also employed by other Asian restaurants on the Top 50 list, including Narisawa in Japan (recipient of the first sustainable award) and Jaan in Singapore.

Another vocal supporter is chef Nate Green of Rhoda. "For me sustainability is about minimising waste, making sure that everything we use is respected and used to its full potential." This can be seen with its ever-changing seasonal menu. "We only buy grass-fed meat, fruit and veg from farmers who don't use pesticides and grow a variety of crops. Our fish is line-caught and our supplier speaks to the fishermen, who advise us what is best and plentiful."

No waste extends to featuring dishes using unwanted cuts. Green says, "Right now I'm working on a Bolognese made with chicken hearts and livers, it's going to be delicious." He also presents The Whole Hog menu once a month. "We roast an entire pig – nothing goes to waste – with numerous vegetable sides." The pigs are sourced from specific farms and chosen for being hormone free and reared compassionately. "We have a responsibility to look after our planet and leave it in a good condition for the next generation."

Internationally known chef Gray Kunz has responded to growing diner demand for healthy people/planet options by introducing the Revitalising Menu to Café Gray Deluxe. The menu is vegan and gluten-free and complements its selection of organic, non-GMO and sustainably sourced options. "We want to provide customers with food that they do not need to have any doubt about. Trying to be sustainable in every aspect requires a lot of patience and work, especially in terms of working with the right suppliers and finding ingredients that satisfy our standards."

Kunz feels that sustainability is only the first step. "The word 'sustainability' is used in so many different contexts I feel it has lost its edge. For me, no matter how hard we try to be sustainable, the sustainable aspects will ultimately decline. I believe that what we eventually want to reach is renewal. Being sustainable takes you to a certain point, renewal means maintaining sustainability and at the same time growing. The Revitalising menu is just the start of a healthy lifestyle concept that we are confident is ahead of its time and hope to share more on soon." 🌱



Chilled Bean Curd, Fresh Garden Peas, Minted Cucumber Consommé, Flaxseeds Serves 4

Ingredients:

For the chilled bean curd:
260g soft bean curd
40g organic flaxseed oil

For the flaxseed-sesame salt
15g white sesame seeds
15g toasted flaxseeds
1g salt

For the peas:
70g fresh peeled peas (substitute for frozen if not in season)
40g diced cucumber
2g salt
2g sugar
10g organic olive oil
2g lemon zest
4g lemon juice
2g chopped chives
4g julienned mint

For the minted cucumber consommé:
200g cucumber
10g mint
10g sliced ginger
1tsp lemon juice
1tsp ginger juice
3g salt
3g sugar

Directions:

For the chilled bean curd:

1. Cut the bean curd into four cubes, glaze with flaxseed oil. Place in a bowl atop an ice pad and set aside.
2. Toast sesame seeds and crush coarsely after baking. Toast flaxseeds and mix with salt.
3. Blanch the peas in boiling water for 30 seconds, drain and chill in ice water.
4. Drain again after the peas have cooled, combine with all ingredients and season to taste.

For the minted cucumber consommé:

1. Wash the cucumbers and juice with the skin on.
2. Peel lemon, add sliced peel to the juice and set aside for final seasoning.
3. Add mint and ginger to the cucumber, and infuse for 12 hours.
4. Season with salt, sugar, lemon and ginger juice. Chill before serving.

To finish, place the seasoned peas around the bean curd, garnish with pea shoots, mint leaves and drizzle with flaxseed oil. Sprinkle a layer of flaxseed-sesame salt on top of the bean curd and serve with the minted cucumber consommé.