

MUST TRY

Warm lemon lava cake with chantilly cream and a sesame tuille (\$12)

This original is such a refreshing change from the cliché that chocolate lava cake has become.



Three times the treat

Vineyard offers Thai, Italian and French cuisines, and does a good job with all

Eats

Wong Ah Yoke



PHOTOS: VINEYARD

Big flavours (from left) Norwegian oak smoked salmon, oven-roasted game hen with roasted potatoes and rosemary gravy, and oven-roasted wild snapper with seasonal vegetables and lemon caper noisette.



When a restaurant offers three different cuisines as diverse as Thai, Italian and French, it's only natural to have misgivings on whether it can do any of them well. After all, it is hard enough to do just one well.

But Vineyard, a new restaurant that opened at HortPark on July 1, surprises by doing a more than decent job with all three.

One reason could be that it is owned by Creative Eateries, which also runs Thai eateries Patara and Bangkok Jam, as well as Western restaurants such as Al Dente, Hot Stones and Barossa.

The company has apparently put its combined expertise into Vineyard and turned out a hotch-potch menu that works.

It may perhaps seem strange to someone new to Singapore to, say, follow a Thai salad with a French duck confit. But locals used to international buffets will be perfectly at home with the mix and match.

What matters more to them are probably how good the food tastes and how expensive it is. And on these two accounts, they can rest assured.

The cooking here is not fine-dining quality but surpasses what you would expect at their prices.

What I also like about Vineyard is that, although the food is plated with stylish flair, the place is not at all pretentious. Food sharing is encouraged, and seeing how generous some servings are, it is wise to share.

For example, during my first visit, I shared two starters with my dinner companion, one Thai and one French.

The grilled prawns in piquant dressing with pomelo salad (\$14) is not as piquant as I would like it to be but the pomelo is plump and sweet, perfumed with a touch of coconut milk in the dressing.

The escargot bourguignon with garlic beurre noisette (\$15) is more impressive, with the tender snails coated in just enough chopped garlic and herbs to lend them flavour without being overwhelming. They come with perfectly crispy garlic crostini but you may want to also dip some plain bread into the tasty melted butter to soak it up.

These starters are followed with a seafood bouillabaisse (\$14). It comes with the same crostini but I like the garlic toast enough not to have reason to complain.

The soup is more like a bisque than a bouillabaisse and the half-shell mussels are probably frozen, but it is a tasty broth and much better than what you can get elsewhere for the price.

For the main course, we both order fish – again, one Thai and one French.

Both the deep-fried seabass with mango salad (\$16) and oven-roasted wild snapper

with seasonal vegetables and lemon caper noisette (\$28) are good.

The mango salad is definitely piquant enough while the noisette for the snapper is amazing. The melted butter has the fragrance of lemon without the tartness and instead boasts the lovely sweetness of honey.

It is served on the side and works equally well whether as a dip for the fish or as a dressing for the garden salad.

For dessert, we share a warm lemon lava cake with chantilly cream and a sesame tuille (\$12). It's a refreshing twist from the usual chocolate lava cake, with bright yellow melted lemon curd flowing out from the middle the moment you sink your knife into the cake.

I'm not a big fan of sour fare but if you are, you should try this.

Back for lunch two days later with the restaurant's owner, I am introduced to more of the menu's offerings. And some really stand out.

The Norwegian oak smoked salmon (\$22) comes with a very nice lemon confit that lifts what can be a standard dish. And

the pan-seared foie gras (\$28) is nicely undercooked so that it retains a melt-in-the-mouth flavour. It comes on top of some sherry-perfumed duck rilette that is perfect with bread.

The main courses of pan-fried duck leg confit (\$28) and oven-roasted Cornish hen (\$26) are nicely done, too.

My favourite dessert is the banana tempura with warm caramel sauce (\$10). It may seem like fancy goreng pisang but the light, crispy batter justifies the name. And the caramel sauce makes friends instantly with my sweet tooth.

There are many more dishes – pizzas, noodles and pastas – that I haven't tried because the menu is so extensive. But judging from my two experiences, they should certainly be worth going back for.

And with the friendly prices and the relaxing greenery and water features of HortPark to provide the perfect ambience, there seems little reason not to return.

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LifeStyle paid for its meals at the eatery reviewed here.



VINEYARD@HORTPARK

33 Hyderabad Road, HortPark, tel: 6479-7977

Open: Noon to 3pm (Mondays to Fridays), 6 to 11pm (Mondays to Thursdays), 6pm to 1am (Fridays and eve of public holidays), noon to 1am (Saturdays), noon to 11pm (Sundays and public holidays)

Food: ★★★★★

Service: ★★★★★

Ambience: ★★★★★

Price: Budget from \$60 a person