



The Legacy of China Garden

Edward Wang Carries the Chopsticks Forward

Nelson Wang rewrote dining rules when he launched his Chinese restaurant three decades ago. Busybee's favourite *Gin Chicken with Mint Sauce* and many other iconic dishes continue to hold sway over its die-hard patrons. For the first time, recipes from *China Garden* now called *CG 83*

Text & Photographs: **Farzana Contractor**



Ingredients for *Bok Choy in Oyster Sauce*, an evergreen dish at *CG83*



Young Edward Wang cooks exclusively for *UpperCrust*

When Nelson Wang launched *China Garden* in 1983, he rewrote the rules of eating out. In terms of restaurant décor and ambience, service and style and of course what he served and how he served. Gone was the concept of dimly-lit restaurants of yore, dark corners and wooded looks. Patrons speaking in hushed tones and what not. Here was *China Garden*, all marble white, brightly lit, sparkling away with talkative diners waving to each other across tables, confident and smiling, happy to look around, see and be seen.

Nelson was a Master Blaster. With brazen aplomb, he stretched his restaurant way under the driveway ramp, adding on more and more space, buying out his immediate neighbouring shops, converting them into more covers and finally launching the *Piano Bar*, an idea way ahead of its times. Cleverly he made it a woman membership club, where by default the husband became a member; unlike all the snooty clubs where the man was usually the member. Like I said, Nelson rewrote rules.

He was much-loved for being his own

self; a simple, hard-working ‘Chinaman’ who was a sincere public relations man. He could and did cook every item on his menu, the most important reason for the success of his restaurant. For example he went to Sasson Dock at 5 every morning to get the best catch from the fishmongers gathered there. He was amazing.

What’s remarkable is, he has inculcated the same principles in his two sons to who he has handed over the reins and semi-retired to Vancouver, Canada where he lives with wife Linda, no doubt blissfully, after a lifetime of striving.

Sensibly he has divided his restaurant business between Edward and Henry, city-wise. Edward carries on the show in Bombay and Henry in Delhi, situated at GK II and another at Connaught Circle.

China Garden in Bombay is now re-christened *CG 83* and has made a full circle shifting out of Kemps Corner, setting shop elsewhere and then returning to the same spot at Om Chambers.

The décor has undergone a change but everything still remains the same. Meaning the menu is fantastic, the



patrons are regulars, and there is still the queue of guests waiting for a table! Except it is Edward who is now calling the shots.

Nelson’s older son is 38 but looks 25, loves to change his hairdo, is pretty grounded and like most Chinese, wise and hard-working. 12 years ago he returned from Canada and took charge of the business. He schooled in Vancouver and at 18 went to study at the *University of Guelph* in Toronto; three years of Hotel Management where he fared very decently and he was off for two years to the *Culinary Arts School of Ontario*. After which he worked for two years at two restaurants, *Grillman – Boathouse Bar and Restaurant* at Queens Quay streets and then at *La Bodega* on John Street.

“If you ask me, I’d say, these were the two years that taught me everything. I worked 18-hour shifts and just came home to drop in bed and return to work next morning!”

Edward may have got *China Garden* on a platter, but he is pretty much a self-made man. While at college he managed to get by earning his way through. No

job was too low, even if dishwashing. At first he lived on campus and later shared an apartment with two other boys. They spent time watching TV on a 14-inch contraption, seated on a second-hand sofa bought from the Salvation Army! Way to go, young Edward.

“Yes, I did want to prove to myself some things, you know. After I returned, yes, the restaurant was there, but continuing its success was a challenge. Making it grow wasn’t easy. I had to understand the new eating habits and put them into practice. Plus our clientele is pretty wide. There are the older people as well as new young ones. So catering to all needs is a delicate matter.”

I can understand his predicament, especially when you have to consider the veg and non veg parts of the menu. “Well,” says Edward, “You won’t believe it, but 65% of our customers are vegetarians. So our menu is now 50:50!”

And understandably, everyone wants to eat healthy? “Yes, that’s right, so we have less oil, vitamin-saving methods of cooking, more sautéed and steamed, less deep-fried, etc, and there is very little usage of MSG.”

But having said that, Edward is of the opinion that MSG has got a bad rap for no real reason. There are certain dishes that just cannot do without adding a bit of the monosodium glutamate. Such as *Stir-fried Chicken* and *Butter Garlic Prawn*. But patrons are informed. These dishes just will not do without MSG, he adds.

Well, I am okay with that. I do believe a little bit of anything can’t be bad. It’s thinking and worrying about it that does more harm!

“So did you feel the need to change the menu extensively?” I ask of Edward, “tell me what is on the menu from old times?” “We have retained most of the popular dishes, there are some items if I remove, customers get mad. So signature dishes remain.” Like my favourite, *Special Pepper Prawns* and Busybee’s weakness, *Gin Chicken with Mint Sauce* and everyone’s favourite, *Corn Cream*. Now corn cream which was introduced by Nelson was all the rage. And I don’t know of a single person who has not burnt the palate of his or her mouth! The centre of *Corn Cream*, molten devil, was awfully hot, however long you resisted eating it after it was served.



Veg Chilli Garlic Noodles



Roast Chicken



Veg Manchurian



Egg Fried Rice



Soya Wine Chilli Fish

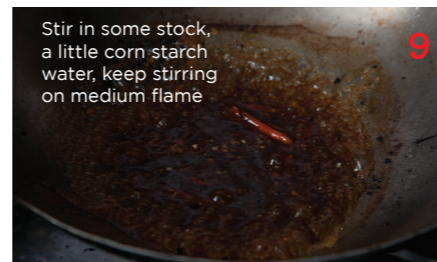
Bok Choy in Oyster Sauce



Heat some water in the wok **1**



In a clean wok, in hot oil add the fresh red chillies **5**



Stir in some stock, a little corn starch water, keep stirring on medium flame **9**



Throw in the crushed garlic **6**



Unfold the sauce over wilted bok choy **10**



Put in bunches of the bok choy **2**



Add a dollop of oyster sauce **7**



Simple, yet powerful is Bok Choy in Oyster Sauce **11**



On high flame, let it cook for a couple of minutes **3**



Throw in some salt, a pinch of sugar, crushed white pepper **8**

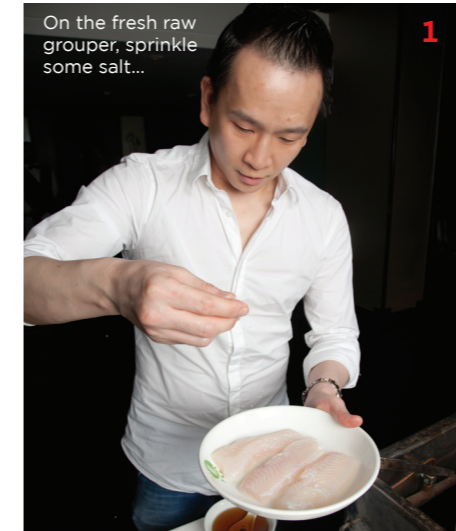


When you remove it, the water should look like this; greenish **4**

“The art of cooking this very simple dish lies in not burning the sauce. So monitor the flame up and down and keep stirring the concoction till your wrist hurts! The quantity of ingredients could be used according to your preference. Like I love crushed garlic and it’s never enough. I also go easy on the corn starch so my sauce is a bit runny.”
– Farzana Contractor

Steamed Grouper in Soy Broth

“This delicate steamed fish with its awesome sauce is an all-time favourite of mine. Been enjoying it since Nelson Wang first cooked it for my husband, Behram (Busybee to you) and I, when we got married, that is in 1985! And now Edward is doing the same. at CG 83. No visit of mine to *China Garden* (sorry I still call it that), is ever complete without ordering this steamed grouper.”
– Farzana Contractor



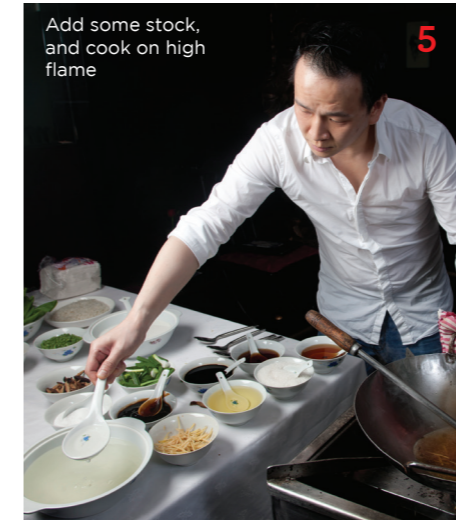
On the fresh raw grouper, sprinkle some salt... **1**



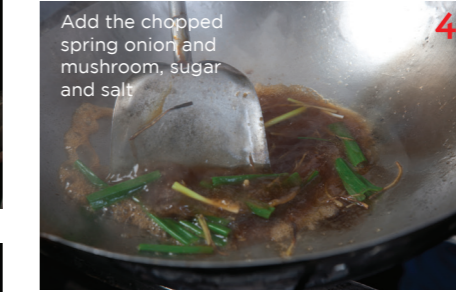
...add some chopped black mushroom, spring onion, ginger slivers and salt to steam **2**



In a wok, add oil, slivers of ginger, stir-fry **3**



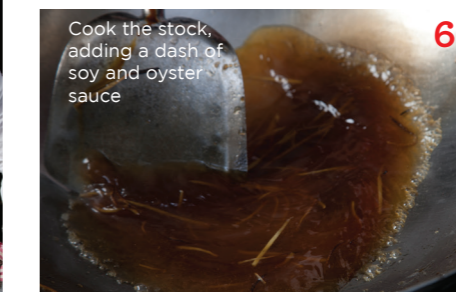
Add some stock, and cook on high flame **5**



Add the chopped spring onion and mushroom, sugar and salt **4**



Bring it to an agreeable consistency and pour it over the steamed fish **7**



Cook the stock, adding a dash of soy and oyster sauce **6**

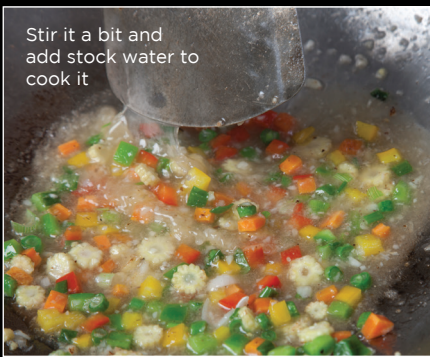


Steamed Grouper, among the most delicate of Chinese dishes

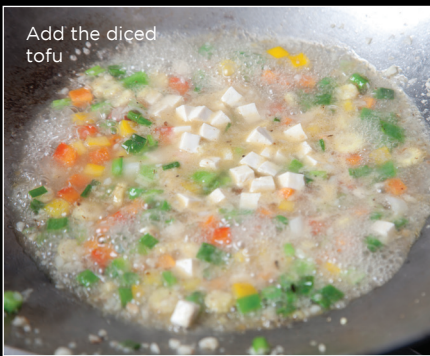
Veg Q Fuk Chu Rice



In oil, add the finely chopped garlic. And then the diced vegetables



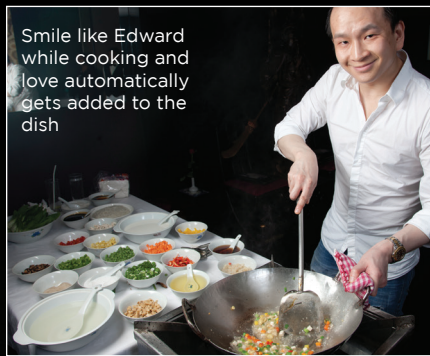
Stir it a bit and add stock water to cook it



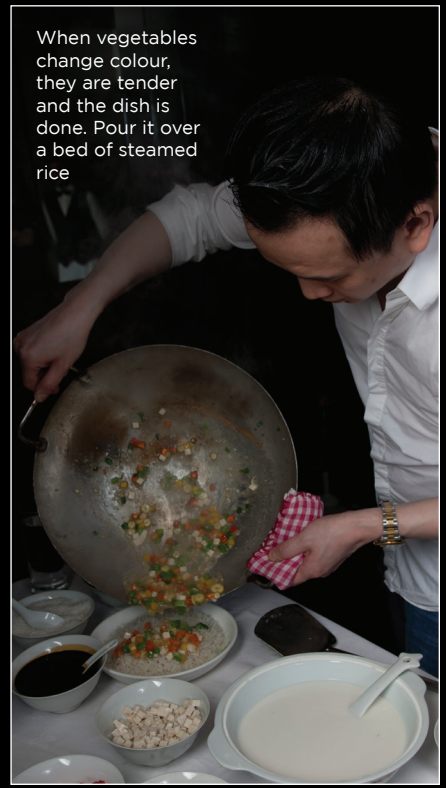
Add the diced tofu



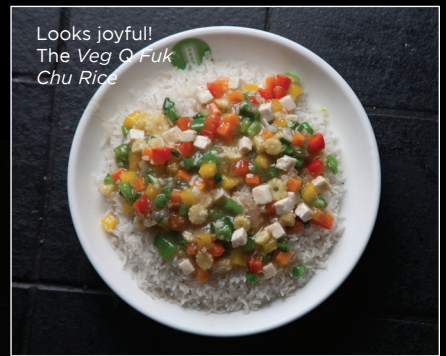
Add the corn starch water in small quantities, stirring on high flame



Smile like Edward while cooking and love automatically gets added to the dish



When vegetables change colour, they are tender and the dish is done. Pour it over a bed of steamed rice



Looks joyfull! The Veg Q Fuk Chu Rice

Corn Starch Water



Baby Corn

White Pepper

Button Mushroom

Carrot

Steamed Rice

Tofu

Green and Red Bell Pepper

Black Mushroom

Vegetable Oil

French Bean

Salt

Stock

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