

palate

EPICUREAN DELIGHTS, DELECTABLE DESIGN AND THE FINER THINGS IN LIFE

fine **CHINA**

A FIRST-TIME RESTAURATEUR RETHINKS TRADITIONS
AND DELIVERS A NEW TAKE ON CHINESE DINING.

Melbourne newcomer Ruyi sets out to create a Chinese dining experience that elevates current perceptions of the cuisine and captures a new Chinese sensibility.



“I WANTED TO CREATE A CHINESE RESTAURANT THAT HAS NOT EXISTED IN AUSTRALIA OR THE WORLD”



CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE: the Ruyi team includes, from left to right, chef Jayden Zhou, owners Sheng Fang and Qian Qian Luo-Fang, and chef Boyee Guan; custom-made tables join Mattiazzi 'Solo' stools by Nitzan Cohen and 'Rio' chairs by Very Wood, both from Italy; handmade pottery vessels for rice, sauces and teas; a dessert of floral jelly, ice-cream and pistachio. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** each design element combines to create an “interesting, beautiful and inviting space”.

Clean, contemporary, refined — words that are rarely front-of-mind when thinking of a Chinese dining experience in Australia. On a laneway off Chinatown’s main strip in Melbourne, however, a new venue has set out to change our perception of Chinese cuisine, dining, service and decor for the better.

“I wanted to create a Chinese restaurant that has not existed anywhere else in Australia or the world,” says Sheng Fang, of his new venture, Ruyi. For Sheng, this meant no clichéd bamboo-lined walls, no red lanterns and an approach to food that breaks away from stereotypes of heavy dishes drowning in thick, glossy sauces. “Chinese food can be fresh and delicate,” says Sheng. “Food was a huge part of my upbringing and we were taught if you were going to eat, eat well.”

While Ruyi is his first restaurant, Sheng, along with his wife Qian Qian Luo-Fang, has been involved in Melbourne’s hospitality industry for years, supplying premium dumpling and noodle products to well-known Asian eateries. With their knowledge of the hospitality industry and a personal interest in design and architecture, the pair developed a distinct vision for Ruyi — a venue that takes the approach of seasonality, premium ingredients and contemporary fit-out commonly applied to European-leaning restaurants, and applies this ethos to the cuisine of their homeland.

There is indeed a refinement in the food presented at Ruyi. Flavours are clean and driven by the quality of the ingredients, not sauces. A top-grade M9 wagyu oyster blade steak is served on a bed of mixed, seasonal mushrooms, the natural earthiness of both meat and mushroom complemented by a touch of truffle paste.

Fresh and delicate are also words that capture the feeling of the Ruyi dining room; its clean lines and warm palette of olive, plywood, ceramic and concrete also breaking free from traditional styles commonly associated with Chinese dining.

Engaging Melbourne interiors and furniture design firm Hecker Guthrie, a detailed two-week-long briefing process resulted in a close working relationship between the firm and Sheng, who project-managed the build. “Ruyi was all about creating a calm space, with the intent to make the customer feel at home,” explains Hecker Guthrie co-founder and one of Ruyi’s design directors, Paul Hecker. “It’s a design based on an exploration of palette, texture and craft, where each element combines to create an interesting, beautiful and inviting space.”

Satisfied with his personal input, Sheng explains that Ruyi, which translates simply to “as you wish”, is in some ways about a recreation of home. “Many stories came out of my childhood home... And I want many stories to come out of this one.” **VL** MATTHEW HURST
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