



## A French renaissance

■ Sarah Gray

Amongst the motorbikes, hawkers and DVD stores in Hanoi's Old Quarter lies a tranquil oasis by the name of Green Tangerine. This Hanoi dining institution has stood the test of time where others have fallen victim to the fickle tastes of tourists, rising rent and inflation.

Open since 2003 and housed in a restored French villa built in 1928, Green Tangerine offers 'French food with a Vietnamese twist.'

There's no doubt that the restaurant's setting is charming. You enter by an open courtyard filled with plants with a cobblestone floor. Inside, the downstairs and upstairs rooms are both elegant and casual. Unlike some other French restaurants in town that can come off as stiff, Green Tangerine has an atmosphere appropriate for a date, business lunch or for passers-by simply looking for a good meal.

To be honest, I was reticent about returning. I had been once before in 2009 and found the décor inviting but the food decidedly average. Not bad, but not really worth the price.

But second time around, my dining partner and I both agreed this was one of the best meals we had had in Hanoi in a very long time. Coming from expatriates with 15 years collective experience of Hanoi, that is saying a lot.

I started my lunch with an appetiser of crab, red and green peppers and tomatoes blazed in cognac presented on a 'mille feuille' cake (\$8). The mille feuille was flaky and crisp enough to complement the moist mix of vegetables and crab.

My friend ordered the duck liver mousse with Cognac and Grand Marnier, crusted with black olives, almonds and onions, dressed on a brioche cooked with sweet white wine (\$9). He raved about this dish, and I can attest that the black olive version was indeed delicious.

The portions were also quite generous for appetisers, so while I'd warn against ordering one if you aren't very hungry, you won't be let down by the portion size.

I took a chance on duck for my main. If duck is done wrong, it can be like eating a dark leathery version of chicken. So if a restaurant can pull off a good duck dish, my hat goes off to them.

I ordered the duck breast topped with roasted mushrooms, cep and tamarind sauce served with a small tart of asparagus with crème patissiere (\$19). The meat was moist and cooked to perfection, with a gravy to die for and the asparagus fresh and slightly crunchy. Even my friend, who stated definitively that duck was 'not for me' was impressed.

He opted for the boneless chicken leg stuffed with currants, almonds, black mushrooms and spices served with lotus and artichoke flower in a French dressing (\$18). The chicken was also moist and very tasty, although we both agreed that the duck was the highlight.

Even though we both ordered poultry, we chose a wine before having decided on our main dishes and went for a red, which was absolutely delicious. So if you're in the mood for a light red wine full of flavour, I highly recommend the Chateau la Gamage Merlot Cabernet Provence Cotes de Blage 2006 (\$35). It was one of the least expen-

sive wines on the menu, which made it an even more amazing deal.

For dessert, my friend ordered the apple and redfruit cake cooked with milk, vanilla, ice cream and crumble (\$6). I chose the chocolate truffle fritters perfumed with tamarind and red fruit flower sauce (\$5).

The truffles were a little unusual because of the fritter. I was not expecting a doughnut-type exterior, but the molten chocolate inside was fantastic. Again though, like the appetiser, the portion was generous, so definitely share this one after a full course meal.

According to Vincent Piro, the restaurant's friendly manager, the most popular dishes are the steamed salmon with lemon grass, ginger and fish sauce (\$20). He also highly recommended the rack of lamb with couscous (\$23), and pointed out that the restaurant's Chef Stephane Yvin incorporates flavours from beyond France and Asia.

Although we plumped for western dishes, there is a decent range of Vietnamese options, which Piro says tourists often order because they know it's a 'safe' place to try quality Vietnamese food.

You will read mixed reviews of Green Tangerine, and both my friend and I had had less than stellar meals there in the past. But for a restaurant with a large tourist clientele, it more than held its own on my last visit. If it can even convert my friend to duck, it's well worth a try. □

**Green Tangerine**

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