



If you've ever had the chance to try one of Chef Philippe Bruneau's dishes, you'll have probably been struck by its refinement, its innovation and above all, by its incomparable beauty. And you'll likely remember that experience forever. At least, that's what he'd like.

Chef Philippe's approach to cooking is rooted in his relentless quest to evoke emotions for a full-on culinary experience - a talent he brings to the Club through his role as the Executive Chef (Western) at The Hilltop in The Valley and the lead at The Eighth. Having made his name through working at some of the world's finest establishments - from Michelin-starred restaurants across Europe, The Ritz-Carlton in Dubai, Sanya and Florida to The Westin and W in Guangzhou - before joining the Club as Executive Chef in 2018, Chef Philippe has one rule of thumb. "You eat with your eyes first," he says. "So of course a dish needs to be tasty, but the presentation is equally important, in my opinion."



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First Things First

Creating a stand-out dish starts with quality ingredients. "Seasonality is really how we try to keep things interesting and fresh, both literally and figuratively," Chef Philippe says. "I don't like to keep a dish on a menu for longer than three months; In some of our restaurants, our menus are changed weekly or once every two weeks." Relying on each season's unique harvest allows Chef Philippe and his team to work with a rotation of fresh ingredients, while staying away from frozen products - a sustainable practice he implements in all of the restaurants he oversees.

In line with this philosophy, Chef Philippe prioritises sourcing his products in Hong Kong to support local farmers and reduce his kitchens' carbon footprint. "Supporting small, local businesses is really important to me," he shares. "I come from a small village in France where everybody knows each other and trades the products they grow. They put love and passion into growing it, and exchanging ingredients becomes more about sharing that passion than just trading produce." Now, he ensures that vegetables and poultry are regularly sourced from farms in the New Territories, and The Hilltop in The Valley even produces its own honey in collaboration with a beekeeper in Yuen Long. But using changing, speciality seasonal ingredients is just the beginning. ➡



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The Art of Plating

Once ingredients are prepared, then comes the crucial step of presenting the dish. "Plating starts with considering a balance of colours, textures, consistencies and proportions," Chef Philippe explains. "For example, incorporating crunchy and creamy elements - different textures - will make the dish much more interesting."

Every chef has their own signature style and process when it comes to plating. For Chef Philippe, it's all about finding inspiration that fuels his imagination. "I really like art, so I go to a lot of art exhibitions and museums and let myself be inspired by the shapes, lines, curves and sharp colour contrasts," he says. "These linger in my mind and feed my creativity for the stories I want to tell through my dishes."

This "storytelling" extends beyond the visual, however: Chef Philippe will also channel his emotions into his creations. "The plating of a dish can look different on any given day, depending on my mood," he says. "Sometimes I want to create a dish where everything is green, for example, and it looks very elegant. But then the following day, I could prepare the same exact dish, and it could look completely different. So it's all about my emotions and how I feel in the moment."

Creator of Experiences

The finale, explains Chef Philippe, is the experience you create around a dish. "Nowadays, people like a show. They are looking for an experience that they can capture and share," he says. So it's all about creating that element of surprise and interaction with guests that will take their culinary experience to the next level.

"At one of my earlier roles, I was given carte blanche with the expectation to create truly unique experiences," recalls Chef Philippe. "It was through that time there that I really understood that creating a lasting impression wasn't just about presentation, but about creating surprises for our guests."

Ultimately, Chef Philippe's approach to cooking is anchored in the values closest to his heart. When he's not leading the culinary team at The Hilltop in The Valley, he enjoys cooking at home for his family and friends. "I like to go to the Wan Chai wet market where I have my local fish monger and fresh vegetable stall, and see what's available," says the chef. "Whether it's comfort food or a more sophisticated fine dining dinner, I think it's important to cook from the heart and tell a story from your heritage. When you put authenticity into it, I truly believe food can bring people together." ●



PLAY CHEF

Upgrade your plating skills and impress your guests at your next dinner party with this private lesson from Chef Philippe.

- 1** Keep it simple. "When I cook for my friends at home, I prefer to stick to simple yet delicious comfort food. I'd recommend to cook a meaningful dish that comes from your heritage rather than something over the top that isn't personal."
- 2** Make sure it's balanced. "Make sure you balance vegetable, protein and sauce. You don't want a dish that ends up too dry."
- 3** Cook smart. "Use cooking techniques that don't require you to be in the kitchen - such as sous-vide cooking - so that you can maximise time with your friends."
- 4** Get creative. "When plating a dish, play with different textures and colours to create a sense of excitement. Different plate shapes, sizes and colours, as well as small plating tools can also come into play to create an element of extra surprise."
- 5** Mind the temperature. "A plate can be beautiful, but if it arrives cold on the table, then it's a fail."