

Vietnamese Cooking Class & Dinner organised by the Multinational Group

My grandmother was half Indonesian and cooked a fabulous “Rijsttafel”; I lived in Hong Kong for three years and regularly tasted the Chinese cuisine; during that time I travelled a lot in Asia and often tasted local food; basically I love Asian food (apart from some extreme Chinese delicacies, I must admit) but I had no idea what Vietnamese dishes would taste like specifically, let alone how one could prepare them!

So when the event presented itself to participate in the event of the Multinational group: *prepare and eat a Vietnamese menu*, I did not have to think twice: I am in!!!

And there I was, Thursday, 28 May, in the beautiful maison de Maître of the ‘Fondation Nadine Alexandre Heusghem’ in Ixelles, standing at a long table, with my cooking equipment (we had received instructions shortly before and already I did not have every required tool, not adding to my self-confidence!!)

I wiggled in; the interest for the cooking event was larger than expected so the table was crowded, but that added to a very good atmosphere (particularly in my case as I was unexpectedly standing next to a former college mate of my daughter’s, how small is this world!!) and we started.

Instructed by our charming chef de cuisine Lan Nguyen we cut various ingredients: vegetables, fruit, herbs, meat, fish; all in a very refined manner, nothing like my “Anglo-Benelux” kitchen practice, and we were instructed to wrap certain ingredients into lôc leaves, a popular Vietnamese dish, and rice loempia sheets.

The folding was hard work! It looked easy and simple when Lan elegantly showed us, but I definitely did not have that subtle touch! And I was not alone!!!

During our preparations I was beginning to wonder: how will this produce a proper dinner?

Well obviously the full class did a lot of preparatory work, but..... the crux was in the kitchen: an amazing team of Lan, Nora, and Mamiék, at the stove and a robust support team at the sink tidying up the mess we made led by Chris, Dominique and Denise.

Whilst the cutters and folders then rested in anticipation of the dinner guests, enjoying a glass of bubbles, the kitchen team ladies Monique, Nora and Irena started to professionally prepare for the 49 persons dinner.

And then it was time to eat.

We were joined by the diners. Out of the afternoon’s work came a 4 course menu. Two entrées: a delicious soup (PHO) and a plate with 3 different dishes, 2 of which came out of the cooking class (Papaya Mango salad & Spring rolls), the 3rd, a ‘Scampis au riz soufflé’, from the professionals in the kitchen. Truly delicious!

Then a main course. The Lôc leaves (that were impossible to fold and kept breaking, seemed to have been miraculously mended!!) with a delicious beef filling and a spring onion sauce.

To be completed by a yummie desert: Taro and Matcha Ice Cream. (Beware Italian Gelateria’s Asian competition is on its way!)

Also the accompanying wines merit mention. Truly from a top class sommelier. I have to admit, not from Vietnam, I believe from a “cave” of one of the organizers.

In all it was a memorable afternoon and evening. To learn to cook, to eat a delicious meal, but most of all good company and a very ----- atmosphere: I cannot find one adjective, it was warm, welcoming, humorous, informal, gezellig (a not translatable Dutch word)!

In short: thank you Multinational Group! When is your next cooking class and dinner?

Liesbeth Knulst