

campus life

One night of culinary genius



Head chef Lior Shabat (middle) helps prepare the meals with Mwenda Chisulo (left) and Neal Bentel (right). Photo: Island School media students

Edited by Ben Young

Thirteen Island School students got a first-hand taste of running their own restaurant, and learned the hard way that plenty of things can go wrong, write **Joshua Lee**

Cooking dinner for yourself is challenging enough - so imagine cooking more than 60 three-course meals in less than two hours.

Well, that's exactly what 13 students did when they opened Nian, a pop-up restaurant that was open for one night only on April 24 in their school hall.

Nian was run by Year 12 and Year 13 students studying ITEC Hospitality at Island School as part of their final coursework unit. The Year 13 students did the cooking, while the Year 12 students were busy in the dining room, waiting tables.

The customers, who were charged HK\$200 each for their meals, were given the choice between three starters, five main dishes, and a platter of mini desserts. The fusion-style menu consisted of European style dishes, cooked with an Asian twist.

The restaurant's head chef - 18-year-old Lior Shabat - was responsible for planning the event, as well as checking each dish that came out of the kitchen. He said the East meets West style dishes reflected the many different cultures present at Island School.

"When creating this fusion menu, we wanted to have dishes with western and Asian influence, and have a

combination of flavours that worked well with the dishes," Lior explained.

For example, one of the dishes was fried calamari - a classic Western dish, infused with a spicy Chinese chilli sauce, a combination that worked extremely well.

Event manager Esther Clement, also 18, had to oversee the restaurant's planning and operations. She discovered that managing a restaurant is anything but easy.

"It was very stressful being under a time crunch to present the dishes to the best quality we could offer as young chefs," she said. "As stressful as it was, in the end the night turned out amazingly, and I'm really proud of the outcome."

Almost as stressful as the day itself was the planning process, which began around a month in advance.

"We came up with the menu firstly through discussions with the class and our teacher, which then led to experimenting and cooking different dishes," Lior said.

My favourite part of the event was everyone coming together

After some group discussion and playing around with different flavours, the team taste-tested the dishes to decide which

ones worked, which ones didn't, and what improvements needed to be made.

Despite the careful planning, the team encountered several unexpected problems during dinner service.

"At one point we ran out of the vegetables that went into the main course], Esther said. "But we ended up [reducing] the portion sizes so that everyone could get some greens and it turned out fine."

And Lior recalled how a mistake in the orders meant at one point they were missing several crucial ingredients.

"We had to make some calls to get them to the kitchen on time," he said.

Despite the stresses involved, the team found running Nian to be a very rewarding experience.

"My favourite aspect of the event was just everyone coming together to create these amazing dishes and presenting it to the teachers and parents," Esther said.

"Putting together a restaurant isn't easy, and the fact that a bunch of students were able to do it was really amazing."

They aren't sure if Nian will ever open its doors again, but Lior hasn't ruled out the possibility. "Maybe one of us in the future will steal the name and idea and create our own successful establishment," he joked.