

How a Five-Minute Interview with Chef Silas Li Turned Into a Two-Hour Meal | Hong Kong Cuisine

[Curator Pick: Silas Li]

The “Legendary Chinese Chef” I Met at a Michelin-Selected Restaurant in Hong Kong

How Did a Five-Minute Interview Turn Into a Two-Hour Meal?

One Man’s Philosophy, A Heritage on the Plate
Hong Kong Cuisine | Chef Silas Li

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What I remember most vividly about Hong Kong was neither its dazzling skyline nor its Michelin restaurants.

It was one chef who turned what I thought would be a five-minute interview into a two-hour meal and conversation.

Silas Li, a chef who spent nearly two decades overseeing private dining for one of Hong Kong’s most prominent businessmen.

At first, I was intimidated by the weight of his career. But when I left, it was not his titles that stayed with me.

It was the almost childlike excitement on his face as he explained a dessert that tasted like custard despite containing no custard at all. It was his obsession with details, down to a single drop of oil or the origin of a particular flour. And it was the way he watched my expression before looking back at the dish each time I took a bite.

That was when I realised something.

The title “private chef to VIPs” does not explain Silas Li nearly as well as the consistency with which he approaches both food and people.

Remarkably, he was no different in the way he treated a person from the way he approached a dish.

I have visited many Michelin restaurants and fine-dining restaurants over the years, but even after returning to Korea, I found myself thinking, *I just want to eat that one more time.*

That had never happened to me before.

This is not a review of a Michelin restaurant in Hong Kong.

It is a record of one meal I keep thinking about, and of the chef who helped me understand why it stayed with me.

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1. Prologue | How a Five-Minute Interview Became a Two-Hour Conversation

“Five minutes. Ten at most.”

Until I boarded my flight to Hong Kong, I genuinely thought the meeting would be brief.

I would ask a few questions I had prepared, listen to his answers, take a photograph with the chef, and leave.

That was all I expected.

But the more I read about his career, the more nervous I became.

The person I was about to meet was **Silas Li**, a chef who had spent many years taking care of private dining for prominent Hong Kong business figures and VIPs.

I arrived thirty minutes early, yet still could not bring myself to walk through the door.

I paced back and forth outside the restaurant, opened and closed my notes repeatedly, and rehearsed the English sentences I had already practised enough to memorise.



긴장한 채 한참을 올려다봤던 Hong Kong Cuisine

Caption: Looking up at Hong Kong Cuisine for what felt like forever, trying to calm my nerves.

Eventually, I gathered myself and went inside.

My first impression was exactly what I had expected. He had a quiet gravitas that made him seem difficult to approach.

The nerves came rushing back.

Carefully, I asked the first question I had prepared — something about the restaurant's values and philosophy, a question I had spent quite a long time thinking about.

His answer caught me completely off guard.

“Brand values? Just relax and write freely about what you actually feel and experience.”

My mind went blank.

Was my question too predictable? Is this really going to be over in five minutes?

What eased my nerves was not some grand speech.

It was a warm cup of welcome tea placed quietly in front of me — and what he did next.

Silas began showing me his wine selection, bottle by bottle.

He told me about rare whiskies and even brought out a wine he planned to open the following day for his mother's birthday.

When I tried to photograph one of the bottles, he noticed that the label was difficult to see through the protective wrap and carefully removed it by hand so I could take a clearer picture.



Caption: A 1945 Château La Mission Haut-Brion that Chef Silas personally unwrapped so I could photograph the label.

I remember thinking,

Wait... is this still the interview I had imagined?

From that moment, I never opened my question sheet again.

The interview naturally became a conversation, and the conversation somehow became a meal together.

We talked about the best way to enjoy food, family, health, friendship, life as a chef, what he hoped to leave behind for younger chefs, and the things he considers most important in life.

The conversation never really stopped.

Before I realised it, more than two hours had passed.

2. At the Master's Table | Silas Li, a Legend of Hong Kong Private Dining

Chef Silas Li | Profile & Career

Born and raised in the UK, trained in French fine dining

Studied French cuisine at Brooklands College, building a strong foundation in European fine-dining techniques.

Joined the opening team of One-ThirtyOne

Became part of the original opening team at One-ThirtyOne, one of Hong Kong's notable fine-dining restaurants.

Private Chef to Dickson Poon

Spent nearly 20 years as private chef to prominent Hong Kong businessman Dickson Poon, gaining extensive experience with exceptional ingredients and high-level private dining.

Executive Chef of Hong Kong Cuisine

Now presents his own style of Contemporary Chinese Cuisine, combining French techniques with the heritage of Cantonese cooking while sharing the philosophy he developed over decades.

SCMP 100 Top Tables Best Chef 2023

Named Best Chef 2023 by *South China Morning Post's 100 Top Tables*.



Caption: Hong Kong Cuisine Executive Chef, Silas Li.

For nearly two decades, Silas Li was, in a sense, a chef whom only VIPs had access to.

He worked as the private chef to Hong Kong businessman **Dickson Poon** for around 20 years.

What makes that background interesting is not simply that he cooked for famous or wealthy people.

Private dining gave him years to work with an unusually wide range of ingredients and techniques that many restaurant kitchens may not encounter regularly. That accumulated experience is now clearly visible in his food.

His cooking therefore feels difficult to define within a single category.

Chinese culinary heritage remains at the centre, yet ingredients and techniques from different regions and traditions come together naturally. Even within a single dish, flavour, aroma and texture are balanced with remarkable precision.

It never feels as though expensive ingredients have simply been placed on a plate to impress.

Rather, every ingredient seems to have a clear reason for being there.

Another part of his story that stayed with me was his decision to open his kitchen not merely to cook, but also to train younger chefs and pass his experience on to the next generation.

Because of that, diners no longer need a special invitation or a particular social connection to experience the kind of food once served at some of Hong Kong's most private tables.

In that sense, Hong Kong Cuisine feels like more than just a restaurant.

It is a place where nearly two decades of experience, once accumulated behind the closed doors of private dining, can finally be shared with a much wider audience.

3. A Two-Hour Meal | The Man Behind the Impressive Career

Silas Li's professional background alone is impressive enough.

But after meeting him, I began to think that technical skill and career achievements were not the only reasons he had earned people's trust for so many years.

He seemed to understand what matters in life, to recognise when another person might be carrying something difficult, and to believe that a meal can sometimes offer comfort.

That way of seeing people seemed to find its way naturally into his food.



Caption: The table where Chef Silas and I spent two hours eating and talking.

In everyday life, we are constantly someone's employee, colleague, family member, organiser or person responsible for something.

Sometimes, in the middle of all those roles, we forget what it feels like simply to be treated as a person.

That day, through my conversation with Silas and the food he shared with me, I felt for the first time in a long while that I had genuinely *met another person*.

There was one moment when I felt that especially clearly.

When my own health came up in conversation, I mentioned casually,

"My doctor said I only need a check-up once every two years."

He immediately replied,

"No, two years is too long. You should go every year. Please make sure you get checked more often."

I remember being almost surprised by how sincerely concerned he seemed about the health of someone he had only just met.

That was when something clicked.

The way he treated a guest, the expression on his face when he spoke about his family, and his wish to pass what he had learned on to younger chefs all seemed to come from the same place.

His priorities in life felt very clear.

He looked happiest when talking about family and seemed to value time with the people he loved above almost everything else.

Cooking was obviously a vital part of his life, but he also seemed to know there were things that mattered even before work.

At first, when he told me that one reason he opened his kitchen was to teach younger chefs, I assumed it was the kind of answer chefs often give in interviews.

But after spending time with him, it no longer sounded like a conventional answer.

It felt more like a wish to return something he had received from life.

Gratitude for the people who had shared the journey with him. A desire to give something back. And a deep appreciation for time spent with the people he loves.

His cooking seemed to have grown on top of those values.

Only then did I begin to understand why his food felt as though it contained something beyond technique.

There was a depth that could not be explained by precision or luxury ingredients alone.

The ability to comfort someone, or to turn a meal into a memory, cannot be taught entirely through technique.

That part comes from life.

Perhaps that is why his cooking carries something no recipe can fully reproduce.

There is a warmth and a philosophy behind each bite.

And perhaps the many prominent people he cooked for over the years were not simply looking for extravagant food either.

Maybe they too wanted a meal that allowed them, for a little while, to put down the tension of a busy life.

A meal that made them feel at ease.

I found myself wondering whether that is the kind of food Silas Li has been cooking all along.

4. Philosophy on a Plate | Why I Still Cannot Forget This Table

I have to admit something.

After visiting so many Michelin restaurants and fine-dining restaurants over the years, at some point I became slightly desensitised.

That was delicious.

That was good.

There were plenty of moments of admiration, but many of those meals faded surprisingly quickly once I walked away.

Silas Li's food was different.

Even now, back in Korea, the flavours and textures from that day suddenly return to me.

I still find myself thinking,

I want to eat that one more time.

I cannot remember another restaurant that has stayed with me quite like that.

Another thing that fascinated me was why other Michelin chefs themselves visit his kitchen.

The answer, to me, became fairly clear.

Silas is not a chef confined to one culinary language.

Born and raised in the UK, he grew as a chef through French fine dining before later exploring Chinese cooking, its structure and techniques in depth in Hong Kong.

Rather than remaining on one side or the other, he has spent years moving between Europe and Asia and creating a culinary language of his own.

That is why the food on his table cannot be fully explained by simply calling it "Chinese cuisine."



Caption: A dessert that somehow delivered the flavour of custard — without containing custard.

I first noticed this unexpectedly through a dessert.

The moment I tasted it, I was convinced I was eating something with custard cream.

So I asked confidently,

“Chef, there’s custard cream inside this, right?”

Silas smiled brightly and shook his head.

“No. There isn’t.”

I tasted it again.

It still tasted like custard.

But apparently, there truly was none.

Then he began explaining, with animated hand gestures, exactly how he had created that flavour.

He looked almost like someone delighted that another person had finally noticed a detail he had spent a long time refining.

And the explanation did not stop there.

He told me that even the oil used in cooking is made in-house, and that different flours are selected according to their origin because gluten levels and texture vary depending on where they come from.



Caption: Shark's fin and goose web — a dish that made me react before I could even think.

Even the goose web, one of the most labour-intensive ingredients, is prepared by hand in the kitchen.

The hair is removed, the bones are taken out, and the ingredient is carefully prepared from start to finish.

I remember thinking,

They really go this far?

But as more dishes arrived, every one of those explanations began to make sense.

The caviar dish. The shark's fin I had never tried before. The dim sum. The desserts.

With every bite, textures seemed to open in layers, aromas followed one another, and eventually everything connected.

"Delicious" felt almost too simple a word.

It was like experiencing several scenes at once, layered together.

Calling it "*a little taste of heaven in one bite*" genuinely did not feel like an exaggeration.

The meal that day consisted of dishes Silas particularly enjoys and values himself.

In a way, he was sharing with someone he had just met the tastes and ideas he had spent years developing.

And every time I took a bite, he looked at my face before he looked back at the food.

Like someone showing a favourite thing to a new friend for the very first time.

The problem was that I lost all composure from the first bite.

"Wow... wait. This is actually..."

My muttering gradually became louder.

At some point I was giving him a thumbs-up, saying "Yummy! Yummy!" and even moving my shoulders because I was so excited.

I scraped every last bit of sauce from the plate.

I realised I was behaving as if I had never tasted good food before in my life.

Silas burst out laughing.

Whenever my eyes widened after a bite, he laughed with me.

Whenever I gave a thumbs-up, he smiled.

And after I repeated, "This is seriously so good," several times, he only became more excited to explain the next dish.

That was when I realised something else.

He is not simply someone who loves cooking.

He seems happiest at the exact moment when another person fully enjoys something he has spent a lifetime studying and refining.

Perhaps that is why he cares about something as small as a drop of oil or a particular type of flour.

His food is beautiful and precise on the surface, but the deeper you go, the more there seems to be underneath.

It is not a cuisine that hits you once with one powerful flavour.

Instead, layers gradually build on one another and remain in your memory.

And perhaps that is why I still have not forgotten it.

5. Epilogue | Why I Chose a Handshake Instead of a Photograph

At the end of the meal, as we were saying goodbye, I hesitated for quite a while.

As a blogger, it would have been perfectly natural to take one photograph with the chef before leaving.

But in the end, I did not take out my camera.

What I wanted to preserve from that day was not proof that I had met a famous chef.

I wanted to remember the conversation, the warmth, the sincerity, and the sense of humanity he had offered me person to person.

By the end of the meal, the person in front of me no longer felt like simply a famous chef or an impressive interview subject.

He was someone who valued his family deeply, put people first, and wanted to pass on what life had given him.

So instead of reaching for my camera, I quietly held out my hand.

In that moment, gratitude came before the photograph.

That handshake did not feel like the formal end of an interview.

It felt like one person thanking another.

And I wanted to preserve that warmth in this article rather than in a single photograph.

I think I also began to understand why his food stays with people.

Not simply because of exceptional ingredients or remarkable technique, but because it is made by someone who seems to know what matters in life.

A concern for people.

A desire to give back what one has received.

And a sincere belief that a meal can sometimes offer another person comfort.

All of those things seemed to have found their way naturally into his food.

So I hope this article is not simply an introduction to a well-known Hong Kong chef and his restaurant.

I hope it becomes a record of the warmth I encountered in one person at one table.

At the end, I am leaving a short clip of Chef Silas explaining one of his dishes himself.

I hope that even a little of the warmth I felt that day comes through in these words and in those final few seconds of video.



If you ever visit Hong Kong Cuisine, I hope you do not sit down at the table thinking only about eating the food of a famous Michelin-recognised chef or tasting expensive ingredients.

Instead, perhaps think of it as an opportunity to encounter **the experience one person has accumulated over decades, the priorities that have shaped his life, and the culinary philosophy and heritage he hopes to pass on to the next generation.**

👉 **[Hong Kong Cuisine Michelin Guide Restaurant Review | From Dim Sum to Fine-Dining Tasting Menus]**

And as for me,

I would gladly board another flight to Hong Kong just to taste that one bite again.

Chef Silas Li | Hong Kong Cuisine