

# Bo So Beautiful

Alicia Walker meets Hong Kong's "Demon Chef", to chew over his two new ventures, **Bo London** and all things **Beautifood**



Beautifood shopfront

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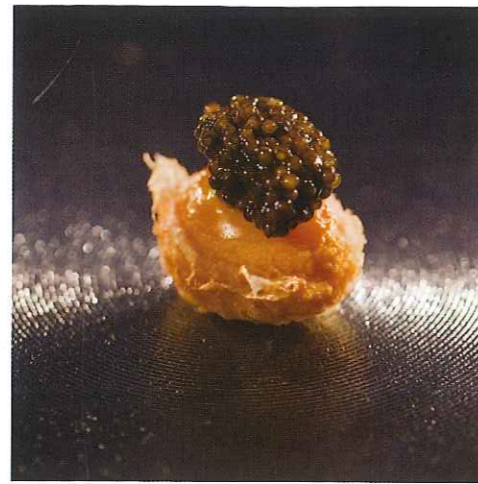
here's something different about Alvin Leung. Is it that his unconventional X-treme Chinese cuisine has earned him two Michelin stars for his renowned eatery Bo Innovation? Is it his cigar-smoking swagger, rock-and-roll tats and molecularly modified meals? Or is it the surprising truth that he is completely self taught and originally trained as an engineer? In fact, he is one of the only self-taught professional chefs to earn two Michelin stars, the others being cooking heavyweights Heston Blumenthal, whom he regularly draws comparisons with, and Raymond Blanc.

The "Demon Chef" earned his nickname and solidified his reputation by taking risks in the kitchen with his molecular gastronomy and is out to shock and delight his customers. "I've been to many countries when shooting the "Maverick Chef" [2011 television programme], and I started to construct a lot of very interesting dishes with bone marrow which you suck like a straw. I started working with beef cooked in

durian. I've taken a lot of weird combinations and tried to work with them. I'm famous for Sex on the Beach [a dish that features an edible condom of kappa and konjac strewn over the sand of powdered shiitake mushrooms] but I'm moving it to London and the next dish is going to be called Bo Sh\*t. I can't tell you what it will be yet, it's still a secret but that's the name. What can I say? I'm the black sheep, I like to show off, I'm an exhibitionist. It's my nature to be different."



Beautifood, steamfish sushi roll



Bo Innovation's caviar, smoked quail egg, crispy taro crust

This culinary daredevil is currently in the process of opening Bo London this month with his same signature food, albeit with a few distinctions. "The menu is going to be slightly different. I'm still going to employ the same philosophy, X-treme Chinese, and I will take some of the dishes from Hong Kong, which I feel they will easily accept in the UK. London has a very good Chinese culture during Chinese New Year there's more going on in London than there is going on here! It's also one of the best places for Chinese food in Europe. They have been exposed to good Chinese food, not egg roll, chop suey and sweet and sour pork, so they're able to better understand what I do here. So, why not take the whole menu, you ask me? Why not do a Robuchon and have the same menu all over the world? Because this is not what innovation is about. Innovation is about going to a country and being able to adapt to what is there. Be inspired and then create something from that country. People in the UK like to experience different things. They are more open-minded to something new and they have a very creative culture. So it's very important to take what is British and showcase what I can do with that. So half the menu will be English-cuisine inspired. And from a business point of view, it's good business to have a different restaurant rather than the same restaurant, as this is such a niche market that I would be competing with myself in Hong Kong. I will apply the same philosophy to every Bo I open. If I open Bo Shanghai, I will take Shanghai inspiration. This gives me the opportunity to do what I do best, or what I think I do best, and that is being innovative."

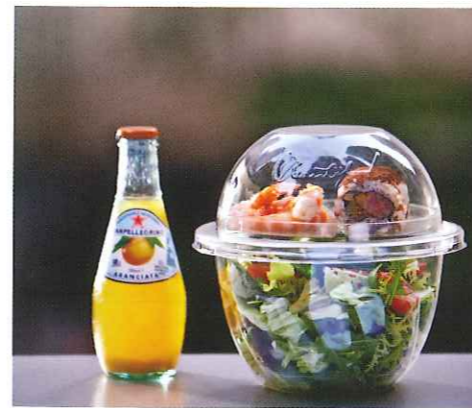
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Born in London and raised in Toronto, the chef has made his home in Hong Kong, a city Alvin says has its challenges.

“I've always said Hong Kong is the most difficult place in the world to do a restaurant. The Hong Kongers are very picky about their food. They love the tastes and textures to be very particular.”

"They're not going to be impressed with the smoke and mirrors. If you take the standard of French or Italian cuisine in Hong Kong, they do it very well here. The standard is very high. You have fantastic Chinese food here too, and not just Cantonese, you've got Sichuan, Hakka, Shanghainese and all that. There is tremendous variety here."

Alvin's training as an engineer has also helped to fortify his resourceful methods of cooking. "My background as an engineer is evident in the way I approach creating. The way of thinking, my philosophy, the way I operate and see things. Engineers are problem solvers who see creating the perfect dish as solving a problem. What is the perfect dish? You might



Beautifood, salad and juice combo



Beautifood, burrito sushi chick

say depends on who I eat it with, the wine I drink, my mood, where I am, the weather. An engineer is very good at seeing things from different perspectives. How do I see the perfect dish? Is there anything that is flawless? If you do not make a mistake, then that's perfect. I think to be innovative there is nothing in the kitchen you cannot do without. As an engineer, if you're without something, we'll find an alternative. There is nothing in the kitchen that I couldn't do without."

As a man who likes to be busy, he has just opened what might well be the last thing you would expect from a Michelin-starred chef: a salad bar. But that's not to say he's doing it conventionally. Alvin says, "Beautifood is a relatively a new concept for me. We are doing food that is beautiful and sexy. The shop looks like a lingerie shop, with the silhouette of a woman with a nice shape bending over. We're trying to say, if you eat correctly and healthily, you're beautiful. The thing about keeping to a diet is you have to stick to it. We're trying to create something that is tasty, with a nice variety so you can stick to it."

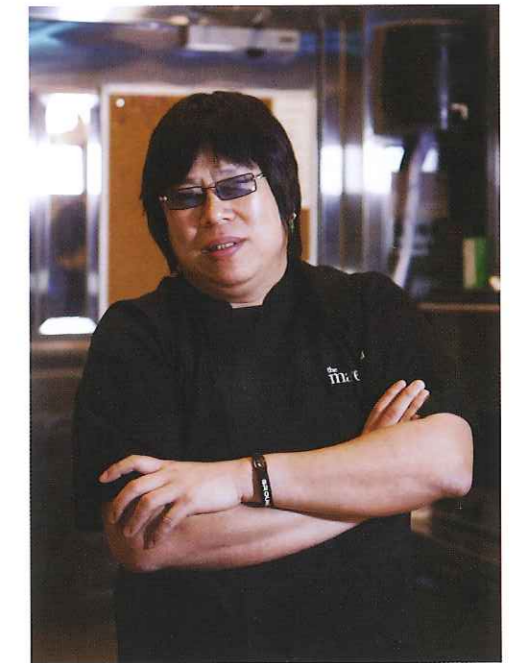
Beautifood offers up five different salads, each designed for a different taste sensation on the tongue, with the Salty "Ling Mut" Salad, Demon Black Caesar and Mandarin Niçoise, as well as the unusual sushi burritos made with a healthy blend of brown and red rice so you can get your carbs in without feeling guilty about it. Some might say it's an unusual turn for the acclaimed chef; so why salads? "I was thinking for a long time about bringing the brand to a wider audience. Bo Innovation is not mass market. My business partner, Jonathan, and I

were brainstorming, and I think we started talking about going on a diet, and he said, 'Let's do salads'. We're trying to do something for the wider market where more people would be interested in tasting what I do. I think what we do is very different from what's going on elsewhere. My brand is X-treme Chinese; the extreme part means to experience something that is exciting, exotic, even erotic. And not, in this case, necessarily expensive." (The healthy portioned salads go for \$50, or \$65 with a drink and sushi burrito). "The flavours are Chinese-influenced, especially with the dressings and the ingredients in the sushi burrito."

With custom-designed containers for the perfect salad toss and an iDelivery option to reach your desks all around the city, Beautifood might just be a dieter's dream. Who knew the self-professed "Demon Chef" could be so nice?

#### Beautifood

Shop 3, G/F, J Senses, 60 Johnston Road (entrance on Ship Street), Wanchai



"Demon Chef" Alvin Leung in his kitchen at Bo Innovation