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PHOTOS: JASON HO

RIGHT THIS WAY

Inexpensive Cafe Oliv, out in the east, gets the details right, down to the home-made dips

JUST a few weeks ago, I wrote about Black Sheep Cafe. The tiny eatery, tucked in the *ulu* reaches of Yio Chu Kang, offers unpretentious French fare at neighbourhood prices.

This week, I found a similar restaurant in the east. Opened barely two weeks ago, Cafe Oliv is a serendipitous surprise. Like Black Sheep Cafe, this little eatery serves up beautifully-plated dishes at prices that are easy on the wallet.

This means you can lug your entire family there, fill up your tummies with delectable posh nosh, and still have some change to spare after that.

Owner-chef Kevin Heng – a young, soft-spoken chap – runs the restaurant with his family. The Shatec-trained chef, who started cooking in his teens, borders on almost obsessive when it comes to the humble sauce.

While many establishments prefer to use fuss-free ready-mixes, Kevin makes all the sauces – even the dipping ones – from scratch. "Everything would taste the same if I used



STOVE LOVE: Owner-chef Kevin Heng has been cooking since he was a teen.

the ones provided by the suppliers. When I make my own sauces, I can tweak the taste to suit my preference," he explained.

A salted-egg soft-shell crab biscuit fritter (\$4.90), served on a pretty bed of fried sweet potato slivers, kick-started my meal. Stuffed with salted egg, the crab was blanketed with biscuit crumbs and deep-fried to a golden crisp. It was served with three dips – chilli sauce, Thai mayonnaise and honey mustard – of which the latter two were made by Kevin. I particularly liked the honey mustard, which was mildly sour and not as pungent as most versions.

Interestingly, Kevin's Teochew roots were the inspiration behind this immensely savoury dish. "I grew up eating salted egg with Teochew *muay* (porridge). I thought it would be interesting to use this ingredient in one of my dishes, too."

I didn't fancy the grilled half-shell scallops with lime Tabasco (\$7.90), though my husband, who dined with me, loved its startlingly tart flavour.

The beer-batter fish (\$10.90), which is accompanied by mesclun greens, potato wedges and garlic tartar, is not to be missed – even if you are not a beer lover. The Dory filets were coated with biscuit crumb batter and became superbly crunchy when deep-fried. I loved how the fish, marinated with Heineken beer, had subtle bittersweet flavours.

Heartier mains came in the form of chargrilled pork ribs (\$14.90) and the traditional braised lamb shank (\$15.90). Both were served with home-made mashed potatoes and blanched asparagus.

The braised lamb shank not only looked appetising, it was also

quite a chunk. I could polish off the meat, and still use the remaining humungous shank bone to brew a pot of soup. The meat was immensely tender and fell off the bone easily, testament to its laborious four-hour preparation process.

The generous rack of pork ribs – sweet and flavoursome with Kevin's home-made barbecue sauce – was so meaty that my husband whispered suspiciously: "Did we order the right thing? So much meat ... Where're the ribs?"

Ignoring him, I forked the meat. In that mouthful, a medley of textures resulted, from the superbly juicy meat and gelatinous melt-in-your-mouth fats to the occasional crispy charred bits. Apparently, Kevin first steams the pork ribs before grilling them. Hence, the meltingly tender texture.

I have never quite recovered from those moments of gastronomic ecstasy; in fact, for several days after, I could not get Kevin's barbecued pork ribs off my mind.

At Cafe Oliv, what you see on the menu is what you get. There are no service or other additional charges but this does not mean the service is compromised. Expect prompt water refills and smiles from the affable wait staff. You can be sure that I'll be back for more.

Do you know of any good makan place? Tell us at
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Teppanyaki A-La-Carte Buffet



Appetizer
Green Salad with Tomato Dressing
Sashimi and Maki
Shake (Salmon) Maguro (Tuna)
Kajiki (Sword Fish Belly) Tai (Snapper)
California Handroll
Yakimono
Tebasaki (Grilled Mid Wing) Unagi (Grilled Eel)
Agemomo (Tempura & Deep-fried)
Ebi (Prawns) Tori Karage (Deep-fried Chicken)
Satoimo (Sweet Potato) Nasu (Egg Plant)
Shishamo Furai (Deep-fried Capelin with Bread Crumb) Cream Corn Korrokke (Cream Corn Croquette)

Lunch	Dinner
\$33.80 (adult) \$23.80 (child)	\$35.80 (adult) \$25.80 (child)

Teppanyaki
Ebi (Prawns Mayonnaise) / Snow Fish
Tori (Chicken) / Gyuniku (Beef) / Vegetables
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Coffee or Tea

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