

Just Open: LiloTang - Canberra's newest hip Japanese restaurant

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January 14, 2015 - 11:30PM



Lilotang reality: Manager Po Yang Chia, head chef Shunsuke Ota and owner Josiah Li. *Photo: Rohan Thomson*



Natasha
Rudra

Canberra's latest hip Japanese eatery has opened its doors in Barton, where dinner might come served in a carefully hollowed-out orange and the wine list includes more than 25 sakes.

LiloTang is the new restaurant in the Burbury Hotel, across the foyer from sister establishment Malamay.

Inside the restaurant is slick with pale timber walls illuminated by strip lighting, lemon-yellow splashes of colour and touches of Japanese anime and pop culture references.



Pork Belly Robata with Yuzu Koshu Miso sauce.

Hanging timber panels with funky cut-outs create a series of semi-private dining areas and the restaurant looks out onto a courtyard in the Burbury Hotel.

It's the brainchild of Po Yang Chia and well-known restaurateur Josiah Li, co-founder of the Chairman Group.

Head chef Shunsuke Ota hails from Japan and previously worked at Nobu in Melbourne.



Chicken thigh skewers with homemade yakitori sauce

Photo: Rohan Thomson

His menu includes a series of classic Japanese bites, such as yakitori skewers and barbecued wagyu okonomiyaki or savoury pancakes and dishes which aren't so well known in Australia, such as sake steamed pipis with grapes and a dish of roast umami vegetables served in a pot made out of an orange.

LiloTang's secret weapon is a shiny new robata grill, which allows chefs to cook food on an extremely high heat using special binchotan charcoal, which gives off almost no flame.

Chia, 36, had a vision for a restaurant that would serve intriguing Japanese food in a relaxed setting.



Movable partitions create semi private dining rooms at Lilotang.

Photo: Rohan Thomson

He learnt the restaurant business in Nobu in Melbourne, where he met chef Ota, and trained from the beginning, doing "all the dirty work".

Two years ago he arrived in Canberra to work at Malamay, and has worked to create LiloTang with Li, bringing a number of colleagues from Nobu to the capital. "It's my vision with Josiah's design," Chia said. "He pushed me very hard to get there and get there in a short period of time."

The restaurant name joins the name of Josiah Li's former design agency, LiLo, and the Chinese word for a gathering place, "tang".



Photo:

Roast Umami Vegetables with Orange Miso in Orange Pot.

Rohan Thomson

Li described the restaurant as "kaiseki meets izakaya". Kaiseki is a style of fine-dining Japanese food in which dishes are served in sequence, similar to a degustation. Izakayas, on the other hand, are working class casual diners serving cheap, quick dishes.

"Kaiseki is a little bit complex, a little bit fine dining, so we relaxed it a bit," he said.

Lilotang will also feature a series of boutique Japanese beers and a long list of sakes.

"We actually bring in over 25 different sakes," he said. "I don't think anyone in Canberra would do that."

The Chairman Group also owns Lanterne Rooms in Campbell and the Chairman and Yip in Civic.

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