

Created by: Debra C. Argen

The View and The Courtyard

The View restaurant at the [Commune By The Great Wall Kempinski](#) in Beijing, China is aptly named, as the "view" refers to the incredible view of the Great Wall.

Imagine sitting outside on a gorgeous sunny day at a table under a market umbrella, on a pretty, wood terrace, nestled in the Shuiguan Mountains with views of the 4,000+ year old Great Wall of China. Imagine the immense task it would be for a chef to create cuisine that would complement that spectacular view. Edward F. Nesta and I had the luxury experience of having lunch and dinner at the restaurant during our stay at the hotel in October 2006, and the restaurant lives up to both the hotel's reputation and of course, the view.

Edward and I did indeed sit outside on the terrace on a gorgeous sunny day, and had a wonderful lunch, although I must admit that our eyes could not help but stray to the sight of the Great Wall. How could we help it? The setting is something out of a dream or a movie, where you almost need to pinch yourself that you really are in Beijing sitting beside the Great Wall!



We began our lunch with a first course of Poached Chicken with Chili Hot Dip for Edward, and I had the Green Leaf Vegetables tossed with Pinenuts. For our second course, Edward continued with his spicy exploration and selected the Deep-fried Squid Balls in Sichuan Pepper Sauce, and I spiced it up a bit with King Prawn Stir Fry in Hot Spicy Chili Oil.



In the evening, we returned to have dinner inside in the restaurant, and had Sweet Corn Soup with Crabmeat and Seafood, and Wok-Fried Rice with an Assortment of Seafood and Crab Broth.

Two nights later we had dinner in **The Courtyard** restaurant, which is a fantasy of a restaurant featuring a twig covered ceiling bringing the outdoors inside, with multi-colored sheer fabric panels dividing the room into intimate sections. Glass walls lead to walled wood floor courtyards with wood lounge chairs where guests can step outside to enjoy a moment under the stars. Spice colored banquetts line the long mirrored walls on either end of the room, and interesting exotic floral arrangements add interest throughout the restaurant.

In addition to the main dining room, and a small lounge area, the restaurant has four private dining rooms, Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, located off the main room, that are decorated according to the season.

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We sat an intimate table for two where our server, Sunny, and our Butler, Pei Chou, began our sumptuous vegetarian dinner began with a Combination of Marinated Dishes (Turnips with Wine Vinegar, Lotus Roots in Vinaigrette, Chinese Kale with Sesame Paste, and Pumpkin Branches with Plum). I could easily have been satisfied if this was the only selection of the evening. Although all of the dishes were very good, I really enjoyed the distinctly different flavor and texture of the lotus roots.



We continued with Stir-Fried Dried Turnips with Green Asparagus and a silky Pumpkin Soup, which we paired with a 2005 Chenin Blanc, Brown Brothers, Australia, with a floral nose, and rich melon on the palate.



Next came Deep-Fried Bean Curd with Cheese, Bitter Melon, Lily Pulp, which was another interesting and appealing flavor grouping. Wok Stir-Fried Fresh Almonds and Deep-Fried Eggplant with Lotus Paste Stuffing completed the course. Of this course, my favorite was the Deep-Fried Eggplant with Lotus Paste Stuffing, with a crunchy exterior and slightly sweet interior, which was so different from any eggplant preparation that I had previously tried. We paired this course with a 2004 Pinot Noir, Montana Marlborough, New Zealand, with tobacco, spice, and pepper nose, with spice, pepper, and leather on the palate.

Fresh Green Leaf Vegetables and Branch in Hot Water and Sprinkled with Brown Rice, and Stir-Fried Rice with Assorted Vegetables followed, which we paired with a 2004 Chardonnay, Banrock Station, Australia, with a white peach and citrus nose, with melon and tropical fruit on the palate, with a hint of oak, and a clean, crisp finish.



For dessert, we had Sticky Rice Dumplings with Black Sesame Paste in a Ginger Soup, and traditional Moon Cakes, served during the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival, which is the third major festival of the Chinese

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calendar. As luck would have it, the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival, also known as the Moon Cake Festival because of the sweet cakes (yueh ping) served, occurred on October 6, 2006, during our stay in China. The Chinese celebrate the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival with feasting, dancing, moon gazing, and moon cakes.



Moon Cakes can be round or square, and are elaborately decorated pastry with the moon, stars, or symbols on them. Our moon cakes were miniature square pastry-wrapped cakes with a star on them, filled with sweet red bean paste, and preserved duck yolk, and we felt quite fortunate to have come at the right time of the year. It was a delightful ending to our stay at the Commune By The Great Wall Kempinski.

Read the other articles on the **Commune By The Great Wall Kempinski** in the **Hotels and Resorts**, **Chefs' Recipes** and **Spas** sections.

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