

FOOD & WINE

Revel with a cause

A popular mainland charity is coming to a restaurant near you, writes Ruth Williams



18

Number of Hong Kong restaurants taking part in the Chi Fan for Charity event

Chi Fan for Charity Hong Kong is a chance to do just as the name suggests, to *sik fan* (eat) for charity. The event is billed as an alternative to buying a table at a charity banquet.

Instead, it offers seats in at least 18 hot restaurants and all proceeds from the night's wining and dining go to charity.

On November 16, each restaurant will set aside a table for about 10 guests and create a special menu, most with wine pairings and other drinks included. Every table has an official host.

Established in Beijing four years ago, Chi Fan for Charity events have raised more than HK\$2.1 million for mainland charities. All proceeds from the Hong Kong ticket sales will go to the Child Welfare Scheme, which funds projects in Nepal that help change the lives of children, youths and women.

Funds from the Beijing event on November 2 will be donated to projects caring for orphans and educating girls in rural areas. The Shanghai night the following weekend will benefit rural education schemes, the disabled and homeless.

In Hong Kong, half of the money raised will help fund the Jyoti Street Project that provides



Guests at one of the Beijing events in November 2011. Photos: Kristen Lum

services to children living and working on the street.

The other half will go to anti-trafficking organisation Shakti Samuha. Run by survivors of human trafficking, the group's initiatives include educating women in remote communities, as well as creating opportunities for earning an income.

The response to Chi Fan For Charity from the city's

People love the idea of an interconnected evening across the city

CHERRY NG, ORGANISER

restaurants has been overwhelmingly positive, says organiser Cherry Ng Pak-wai. "People love the concept, the idea of an interconnected evening across the city, meeting friends and new people," she says.

"There's no dress code; you can wear whatever you want and everyone will get together at the after-party."

Chi Fan for Charity was founded by Michael Crain, a former chief of staff at the US embassy in Beijing. He came up with the idea after attending many fundraisers where restaurants donated gift certificates.

"I knew I couldn't ask any restaurant to close its doors and give us the entire space, losing an entire night's income, but I did think the restaurants could provide Chi Fan for Charity with a table of 10."

For the first event, Crain asked some philanthropically minded friends to host a table and invite their friends.

"I wanted to start small but with little effort we had 16 restaurants agree to participate. The after-party was really an afterthought, but it brought all the tables together somewhere everyone talked about the incredible meals they'd had."

Crain says the hosts are an integral part of the event. "All the

hosts have been incredible and brought their own style and friends to the table. The ability to meet in a relaxed atmosphere, enjoy an incredible meal and conversation together, all for a good cause, means all have a great time."

At the Hong Kong event, diners will meet a group of hosts including photographer Joyce Yung and Derek Ting of *Supercapitalist* fame, who will co-host a table at Alfie's.

At Stone Nullah Tavern, author Xu Xi will share literary tales over modern American cuisine, while at Blue Butcher, author Nury Vittachi will hold court. Blue Butcher head chef Danny Chaney says he and his team are looking forward to cooking "some great meat" and doing their bit to help.

The charity's spread to Shanghai and Hong Kong has been driven by participants at Beijing events, with Crain providing encouragement and advice to help get the newer events started.

There are tables at 53 Shanghai restaurants this year, including 8½ Otto e Mezzo Bombana, M on the Bund and Downstairs with David Laris. The Temple Restaurant Beijing and Maison Boulud are among the 56 restaurants taking part in the capital's event.

Crain says Chi Fan for Charity now reaches a broad cross-section of Beijing food lovers. "The attendance has moved from primarily expats to an equal number of expats and locals. This has been interesting, as in the larger population more local Chinese become more philanthropically minded."

While the name Chi Fan for Charity may not mean much outside Greater China, Crain hopes the concept will translate. "I would love to see Chi Fan for Charity type events set up all over the world with the monies raised going to local charities," Crain says.

"We all love to eat and we all love to see our friends and meet new ones. I hope the idea is copied again so more and more worthwhile charities benefit and those less fortunate receive the support they deserve."

Tickets include free admission to the after-party at Kee Club. life@scmp.com

Participating restaurants

Tickets for dinner and the after-party cost from HK\$750 to HK\$1,500 and can be purchased through chifanforcharity.org from 9am on October 16.

- | | |
|---|--|
| Alfie's (The Reserve)
Tel: 2530 4422 | FoFo by el Willy
Tel: 2900 2009 |
| Aqua Roma
Tel: 3427 2288 | Grassroots Pantry
Tel: 2873 3353 |
| Blue Butcher
Tel: 2613 9286 | Keel Club
Tel: 2810 9000 |
| Brickhouse
brickhouse.com.hk | Pak Loh Chiu Chow
(Hanoi Rd branch) Tel: 2723 6828 |
| Chez Patrick Restaurant
Tel: 2541 1401 | The Principal
Tel: 2563 3444 |
| Club Chow
Tel: 2907 1968 | Shore
Tel: 2915 1638 |
| Common Room
Tel: 2525 3599 | Spasso
Tel: 2730 8027 |
| Domani
Tel: 2111 1197 | Spices, The Repulse Bay
Tel: 2292 2821 |
| Duddell's
Tel: 2525 9191 | Stone Nullah Tavern
Tel: 3182 0128 |



Kagen in Shanghai took part in a Chi Fan for Charity event two years ago.



Money raised from ticket sales will go to the Child Welfare Scheme in Nepal.

WINE OPINION
JANE ANSON
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Consulting the last line of defence

If you happen to be in a French wine region this October, you may want to avoid narrow roads.

If you do take a picturesque track that steers you alongside vineyards heavy with fruit, your reward will most likely be trailing behind a slow truck loaded with crates of grapes, or sitting nerve-wrenchingly close to a harvesting machine that will wave its oversized arms towards the bonnet of your car as you pointlessly beep your horn and look for a safe place to overtake.

There is, however, a little sport that you can indulge in while you're sitting in this particularly seasonal traffic jam. Try to count the four-wheel-drive vehicles that waste no time in deftly manoeuvring their shiny flanks around any obstacles in the road, leaving both harvest machine and hapless tourist in their dust.

Behind the wheel is likely to be a wine consultant, the last line of defence against a wasted year in the vine, and a cog in the wheel of the grape harvest that is every bit as important (they would have you believe) as the optical sorting machine and the shiny pneumatic press.

"Consultants can of course overstate their importance," says author and winemaker Alain Aviotte with a wry smile. "They make a difference if winemakers let them, which means if they take their advice. But the consultants themselves have to take into account the individual

requirements of each client and not ride roughshod over their knowledge of their own wines."

Wine consultancy has proliferated over the past few decades, and there is no region so small in France today to be exempt. In France, the title of oenologist dates back to 1955 when the trade was officially recognised by law. There are now 2,000 professionals working in vineyards, research centres and laboratories in the country.

The trade tends to be split between local experts who stay close to home - Bertrand Daulny in the Loire Valley, Kyriakos Kymigopoulos in Burgundy - and others who travel widely, both across France and internationally.

Bordeaux, perhaps because of its size (it has around four times as many grapes as Burgundy) and its fame, has at least a dozen sought-after names. A quick run through would give you Michel Rolland, Alain Raynaud, Hubert de Bouard, Jean Luc Thunevin, Stéphane Derenoncourt, Pascal Chatonnet, Denis Dubourdieu, Eric Boissenot, Olivier Dauga, Jean-Claude Berrouet, Stephan Toutoundji and Henri Boyer. And that is before the dozens and dozens who are employed by the local ministry of agriculture or wine-testing laboratories in the area.

At this time of year, these are the people who will start their days long before daybreak and



finish up in the early hours, as they juggle phone calls, heading out to vineyards to taste the progress of grapes and juice, and spending time in their laboratories exhaustively testing pH and sugar levels in the ripening fruit.

"Your phone must never be off," confirmed Dauga, an ex-rugby player turned consultant, as I travelled around with him in his gas-guzzling four-by-four a few harvests ago.

For the poor 2013 harvest, the last line of defence will be even more crucial than usual.

"When things are more complicated weather wise, people rely more on their consultants," says Chatonnet, consultant for Chateau Cos d'Estournel in Saint-Estephe and Chateau d'Issan in Margaux, among others. "This year we will be very busy over the next few weeks, as everyone will be asking

for the best dates for picking the grapes. This is probably the most crucial decision of the year, the one that will determine whether your hard work throughout the season translates into a bottle of wine that tastes good and sells well. But, once we have helped them reach that first decision we might find the phones go quiet for a while as everyone rushes to get their grapes in as quickly as possible."

"Consultants are useful for vineyard advice, of course," says Aymeric Roborel de Climens, director of Chateau de Panigon in Bordeaux's Médoc. "But they are also someone to share our worries with - and during a difficult vintage, a friendly ear can be just as important as advice on yeasts and fermentation temperatures."

Jane Anson is a wine writer based in Bordeaux

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