

Belgium lays it on the table

By SHI YINGYING
CHINA DAILY

Chambar Bistro has been packed every day since it opened two months ago. Shanghainese seem to be mesmerized by Belgian delights — the beer, the chocolates, the cheeses and the fashion. The surge in popularity at this restaurant has given the Belgian phenomenon unexpected visibility.

Belgian cuisine is said to be French quality in German quantity, and restaurant owner Fissal Oubida couldn't agree more.

"Our concept is to provide food without being pretentious," said Oubida. "We are cozy and the food is big, we talk to customers to make them feel at home."

Nestled next to a line of small Chinese restaurants and noodle stations, Chambar is hidden in a three-story house near Huaihai Road. Once stepping into the converted bistro, the first person welcoming you will probably be Oubida.

The Chambar is, more than anything else, Oubida's personal, enthusiastic, gastronomic statement. Decorated with red-and-white-checked tablecloths, there are about six to eight tables on the first floor with more seating on the second. The restaurant is not big, but very attractive, with pink stucco walls covered with exotic posters.

Even though mussels generally aren't served as appetizers, they'll be one of the first things guests see on the menu. Served with six different kinds of sauces, mussel-worshippers come with expectations.

"Belgium stands for mussels, beer and waffles," said Oubida. "This is the closest place to Belgium in Shanghai."

"Our mussels come with plastic bags filled with sea water and they're imported from Australia," said Oubida proudly. "We have mussels delivered three times a week to make sure they're fresh."

Oubida will teach you the right way of "eating without being pretentious". Forget about a knife and fork and use your hands eat the slippery shellfish.

"You can use one shell as the spoon to pick out the meat," said Oubida. "That's how Belgians eat mussels."

The broth the mussels come in is not to be wasted as it becomes like another course. Ask for some bread to dip in it. That's the style of Chambar.

The best thing to go with mussels, apart from Chambar's homemade French fries, is ice-cold Belgium beer. Offering more than 18 kinds of Belgium beers, with a different glass to go with each one, the restaurant has a separate beer menu for the long hot summer. Among these, the cherry-, peach- and berry-flavored beers are most popular among the ladies.

Kwak, a Belgian beer in an unusual glass, is worth special attention. A wooden stand holds the Kwak vessel, a 25-centimeter glass tube with a flared top and round bottom. The glass would tip over if you tried to set it down on a table.

Kwak is a sweet beer with tastes of vanilla com-



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Kwak beer (above) and mussels (below) represent the taste of Belgian food.



bined with a citrus tone. It goes very well with all kinds of seafood, which are available in Chambar.

For dessert, everybody orders waffles. As for many Shanghainese, Belgium is simply the country where waffles — strawberry, chocolate or honey encrusted desserts dusted with sugar — come from. The chocolate waffle here is a true bite of Belgium.

From beer to mussels to waffles, an evening at Chambar will provide an authentic Belgian dining experience in Shanghai's multifaceted dining scene.

IF YOU GO

Chambar Bistro

139 Xingan Road (near Yandang Road)
021-5306-2551

Price range: 250-350 yuan per person

Opening hours: 4 pm to 1 am

information

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021-2329-8888

French treat

With its two restaurants nestled on the tree-lined Wulumuqi Road and in the Gubei area, Café Montmartre offers a variety of authentic French cuisine. Its focus on rich and classic dishes ranges from the simple cream of mushroom soup to the robust balance of grilled lamb chops, with business lunch set as a steal. The restaurants are open for lunch and dinner with a weekend brunch at the Hongmei Road location.

Gubei branch: 3911 Hongmei Road, 021-6261-8089

Changle branch: 66-68 Wulumuqi Road M, 021-5158-9377