DINING IN

by Miranda Shek

Because hungry stomachs yearn for fusion cuisine, open-minded explorations for brand new dining experiences lead to “forbidden” territory – the toilet, just round the corner in Mong Kok.

Modern Toilet, a cafeteria for the adventurous, young and hip, challenges diners by mingling the two daily must-visits, toilet and kitchen, and creating a unique fusion experience for diners.

“It is a bizarre but trendy concept, to eat in the toilet. It is such a wrong mix-and-match, but it works for us,” said Samantha Foo, who was on a girls’ night-out with her secondary schoolmates.

The interior design of Modern Toilet is no doubt the shocking gimmick for attracting customers.

The ordinary setting of chairs, tables and cashiers are replaced by toilet embellishments. Modern Toilet dares its customers to sit on a marston, the more endearing name for toilet bowl, to eat on a washing basin, and to drink, literally, out of urinals.

The concept, brought in from Taiwan this summer, is based on the belief that “innovation could create fortune;” its motto. Modern Toilet is certainly not a posh and stylish restaurant serving candle-lit dinners for romantic couples. It is more like a playground, with multi-coloured Lego-esque tiles.

“It is hilarious and cool here. I can’t wait till I get my poo-poo ice cream after the hotpot,” six-year-old Joseph Poon, a first-time customer said, while urging his mother to finish the main courses quickly.

His mother, meanwhile, was less thrilled by their new dining adventure, saying “I suppose I have nothing against it, as long as the food is hygienic and does not taste like toilet-flush.”

Modern Toilet offers a variety of tastes in its menu, multi-cultural meals including meat-ball curry, Wash Basin Gratin and Bathtub Gratin (Bolognese Spaghetti and Mediterranean seafood platter respectively). The highlight of the menu is the Marton Hotpot, which has a variety of flavours, like Sichuan Spicy Dish, Korean Kim Chi Pot, Assorted Beef and Pork Pot.

Modern Toilet is perhaps a dining experience for the eyes more than the taste buds. All dishes are served in a bathtubs, toilet bowl, urinal, and excrement-shaped seasoning plate. Some customers said that the presentation was cute, creative and thoughtful; however it is simply too much for some.

“It is astonishing how young people nowadays can imagine all these odd concepts. It was simply rude to consider eating out of a toilet bowl in my day,” said Mrs Lo, who was taken to the restaurant by her grandson. She was very disapproving of the washroom-themed cutleries and plates.

Many customers have a sweet tooth, making dessert a must-have on every dining tour. All desserts are named after faeces. The English version of the desert menu uses restrained language, but “for all Chinese customers, all these ‘funky and swanky’ names for the desserts require parental-guidance, since all of them have a faeces theme,” said Marilyn Tse, who was dining in the restaurant with her boyfriend.

“I am fine with all desserts named after different types of faeces. It does not affect my appetite at all, I think it is daring and of course a little gruesome, but it is hip,” said Marilyn’s boyfriend, Wong Ka-kit.

The menu and the design of Modern Toilet are imported directly by its owners, known to local as IQ Professor. The two Taiwanese entrepreneurs, being the 1980s children, had a keen memory of a brown, spiral excrement-shaped character from the cartoon

There are 14 franchised toilet-theme restaurants in Taiwan. The Hong Kong store arrived in Mong Kok, opposite Langham Place on Portland Street, in July. It may be that “toilet-lovers” do not have to wait long until a second Modern Toilet is opened in Causeway Bay.

Eating at Modern Toilet has a surprise extra bonus. On top of the fun and excitement the kitchen brings to the washing-basin tables, the cafeteria gives customers the experience of fame because of the endless camera flashes sparkling in every corner of the cafeteria.

Most customers, either first-timers or regular patrons, pull their digital cameras out to take snapshots of their food and the interior design of the cafeteria. Hence no one can escape the flash-lights.

The cafeteria manager said customers were welcome to take as many photos as they wished, and customers often upload the pictures and videos to the web. The giant brown faeces-shape stuff-toy at the entrance is definitely the major attraction for snapshots.

Modern Toilet is a bustling cafeteria. On weekdays, the queue for tables starts at around seven o’clock, when dinner gatherings peak. On weekends, it is advisable to make reservations for those customers who have little patience to wait on line. After all, there are only 98 toilet bowls in the cafeteria.

“It was embarrassing last time when my friends and I came here. When the bill came, none of us had enough cash. I had to run to the MTR station ATM,” said Anthony Liu Tak-wai, who had come back to eat for the fifth time since the cafe’s opening in July.

The covered urinals are used instead of cups.

“The old-school Japanese cartoon, Doctor Slump, more commonly known to local as IQ Professor. The two Taiwanese entrepreneurs, being the 1980s children, had a keen memory of a brown, spiral excrement-shaped character from the cartoon.

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