

Review of Sage Restaurant & Wine Bar's French-Japanese cuisine

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If the last time you visited Sage Restaurant & Wine Bar at The Gardens Residences was sometime in early 2023, your next visit will have a surprise in store for you.

The swanky French-Japanese restaurant reopened on January 23, 2024, with a facelift after about nine months of renovation. "Imagine walking into a garden in France," a press release states of its design.

What comes to mind for you?

Well, gone are the deep blue accents throughout the space that you might have once been familiar with, replaced with the more cosy and earthy tones of sage, olive, and emerald.



It's all part of the restaurant's plan to break out of the "just fine dining" mould to give diners a slightly more relaxed and casual yet still-refined experience.

I would say the new look feels much more elegant and mature, but I might just be biased towards the green hues.



Of note is a new bar area where guests (diners or not) can indulge in Sage's extensive menu of wines, and three private rooms that host 10, 15, and 20 guests respectively.



There appears to be more variety of seating too, from intimate curved booths to stylish column seating, and of course, your standard tables and plush chairs deeper in the restaurant.



The ambience is on point, so what of the food?

Appetisers was house-made ciabatta, crispy on the outside and bouncy-soft on the inside, paired with a basil-olive oil dipping sauce. I'm quite the bread fiend at fine dining establishments, and this totally satisfied my expectations.



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I could have kept eating it throughout the rest of the dishes (and I did)

But the best was yet to come. I had looked up Sage's new menu before going over, and a dish that had really caught my eye was the **Kobe Carpaccio with Black Truffle and Condiments (RM118)**.



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Thin slices of gorgeously marbled Kobe beef topped with black truffle and croutons—this was so melt-in-your-mouth tender I almost didn't need to chew it.

It was umami, tart from the condiments, and refreshing all at once. It was everything I had imagined, and *better*.

For those more partial to seafood, perhaps the **Smoked Octopus with Brandy Aioli and Caviar (RM98)** would be a preferred choice.



The smoked octopus took on a flavour reminiscent of chicken, and it was cooked to perfection with just the right amount of bite and chew.

Under the modest complexity of the condiments, there was a sweetness to the octopus, and in all, this was a dish of harmonious flavours.

The **Aged Cod Fish and Spiced Cauliflower (RM138)** main was a pleasant surprise. Deceptively “ordinary” in outward presentation, the fish has actually been aged in *shio koji* (a paste made from fermented grain that’s usually rice, water, and salt) overnight.



According to Chef Don John, who has been the mastermind at Sage for the past four years, this ageing method gives the cod a firmness and takes out any fishiness.

This leads to a mellow, buttery flavour and super juicy flesh that flakes with little

resistance. The gravy tasted like very mild Japanese curry, thickened with blended cauliflower, and the well seasoned and spiced cauliflower florets might have had some Indian influences.

My only complaint here was that two florets in a dish is not nearly enough for peak enjoyment. More please, chef!

Chef Don John flexes his culinary skills again with the **Roasted Free Range Chicken with Cep Cream and Truffle (RM128)**, which had chicken breast and thigh cooked two different ways.



The chicken thigh was prepared in a salt-baked style, leaving the naturally fattier flesh tender and juicy under crispy, salty skin.

There was also no hint of dryness with the chicken breast, since it's slow cooked with the bone in for 2.5 hours, allowing the heat to gradually spread instead of directly cooking the meat. The cherry on top was the cep cream, which added depth to each bite.

The **Slow Cooked Australian Lamb with Black Truffle Potato Puree and Mix Herb Jus (RM138)** was simply indulgent, with a robust flavour and not too much gaminess. The meat was easy to chew but quite fatty, which might end up being a bit *jelak* for some people.



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On the other hand, the potato puree was to die for in all its truffle-y and garlicky glory.

The **Grilled Wagyu with Black Garlic and Chitose Corn (RM188)** wasn't as fatty but still had a rich, beefy flavour. Shoutout to the Chitose corn though, which was buttery and sweet with a delightful texture, complementing the meat wonderfully.



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Dessert was the **Signature Souffle (RM58)** and **Vanilla Ice Cream with Ardoino Olive Oil (RM18)**. With Sage's French influence, the soufflé having a good rise came as no surprise. It was light and airy with a sugary crust on top and all around.



We did find it a tad too sweet for us, although thankfully, the paired rocher of vanilla ice cream toned it down.

The same vanilla ice cream was served with Ardoino olive oil, drizzled at the table. The olive oil lent a smooth, fruity aftertaste to each spoonful of ice cream, but we'll definitely say that it's an acquired taste combination.



While the old Sage menus were built on imported ingredients, the new menus have made a sustainable shift to using more local ingredients.

Examples include vegetables from Cameron Highlands, and seafood from Sabah and Kuala Selangor. This changed the way Chef Don John and his team worked in the

kitchen, as he pointed out R&D can be challenging to bring out the best in local ingredients.



Chef Don John

But his efforts have not gone unnoticed, and Sage's menus still retain its original influences, which is mighty impressive. It's great to see more fine establishments giving local ingredients their deserved time in the spotlight too.

To savour the chef's creations yourself, you have the options of a lunch set menu (3-course or 4-course, and changed up biweekly) starting from RM178, or an a la carte dinner menu.

And worry not if you want a dinner course instead, because the team is busy working on one, with hopes of revealing it by May.

Sage Restaurant & Wine Bar

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