Ru Yuan, Hangzhou, Mainland China, Asia

Restoring pride in Hangzhou's culinary identity

Awakening the past: There's something of the fantastical, the legendary, about Ru Yuan: sequestered in a chlorophyll-green corner of Hangzhou's Botanical Garden, this three-tiered temple of Hangbang cuisine may be modern in design, but its quiet stateliness – echoing that of a Southern Song Dynasty pavilion – gives onlookers the impression that it might always have been there, sitting stolidly behind a veil of mature broadleaf trees. Fitting, then, that this is a restaurant dedicated to reinterpreting centuries-old culinary traditions for a 21st-century clientele.

Press pause: From the moment you take a seat in one of Ru Yuan's crepuscular dining spaces, you'll also get the feeling you've been suspended in time. Everything is understated, with muted colours, clean lines and contemporary furnishings ensuring the focus remains firmly on the enduring soul and significance of each historic dish placed before you. Meanwhile, carefully framed views of the surrounding woodland subtly reinforce the restaurant's inextricable link to place.

Refinement over reinvention: Chef Fu Yueliang is widely regarded as the man who brought Hangbang cuisine to the world stage – but he's actually more of a restorationist than a revolutionary. A Hangzhou native and proud custodian of the city's culinary heritage, he's spent more than four decades mastering the time-honoured recipes of his hometown, tweaking and polishing them to fine-dining perfection. The same ethos shapes his sourcing, too: the vast majority of ingredients come from the rivers, pastures and plantations of Zhejiang province.

A feast of finesse: From West Lake vinegar fish to sautéed river shrimp with Longjing tea leaves, the menu is studded with elevated Hangbang delicacies,

each one a skilful balance of textures, flavours and meticulous presentation. The pièce de résistance is the Gold Medal Braised Pork: a paper-thin ribbon of pork belly painstakingly folded into a pagoda-like tower. It’s glossy, rich, sweet and savoury – and the structure of the dish allows fat and lean meat to mingle in every sumptuous bite.