

Bowling 'em over!

YY38 HOTEL

There is a culinary success story from the cesspool, and it is called the T-Bowl Restaurant.

By KEE HUA CHEE

Admit it, you have chatted on your handphone, nibbled chocolate, sipped Coke or read a newspaper while sitting on the toilet bowl. Perhaps the only thing people won't do while on "the throne" is to eat.

Well, now you can. Sort of. Dining at the T-Bowl Restaurant at Sungei Wang Plaza, KL, or Queensbay Mall, Penang, is like dining in your water closet. Everything usually found inside your private place of ablutions is an integral part of the dining experience in this toilet-themed restaurant.

But why? "Once you lock the bathroom door, you are safe from the rest of the world, so I just wanted to recreate this sense of privacy in a restaurant!" explains Samuel Tan, owner and creator of T-Bowl Concept Restaurant.

At 28, Tan is as hip and happening as the customers who frequent his restaurants. The young entrepreneur with a degree in computing opened his first toilet bowl restaurant at Queensway Mall in Penang in 2008, and now two years later, his outrageous dining concept hasn't — wonder of wonders — been flushed down the sewers.

"I like spending time in my bathroom. I enjoy long showers and soaking in the tub, taking my time washing and shampooing my hair. I like to read when 'doing my business'. Of course, the toilet bowl restaurant came to me when I was sitting on one! I thought how nice it would be if I could repeat this experience in a

public place without getting arrested.

"That was when the toilet bowl restaurant idea hit me," he recalls.

Many thought he was mad when he first aired his idea. Even now the conservative types choke at the thought of ordering Big Poo Fried Rice! Of course, his customers are mostly those in the 15-30 age group.

"I did think of a high-tech restaurant using computers, handphones and modern equipment as decoration but that would be just another restaurant. My toilet restaurant would be more funny and interesting and get people talking. After all, whatever you eat will have to reappear sooner or later in your toilet bowl!" giggles Tan, who opened his second T-Bowl at Sungai Wang four months ago.

The menu of Western, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Asian fusion dishes are rather run-of-

mill but the presentation will either whet your appetite or immediately make you go on a diet. As you enter, a mannequin dressed in waitress uniform lounging inside a bathtub waves at you; a Peeping Tom dummy peers over a dividing wall down at you. Toilet paper dispensers are used to decorate the walls.

If you order the noodle soup, it will be served to you in a miniaturised custom-made toilet bowl, while the rice dishes are presented on toilet bowl covers. Desserts come inside a mini-bath tub while drinks are in urinal-shaped mugs!

"The bowls, plates and cups are specially made to my design and the toilet bowls diners sit on are brand new," Tan reassures.

"A few patron have asked if they had been used before, but please rest assured that each is totally new. The covers are reinforced plastic so people can sit on them without fear of breakage. Each costs over RM300," he says.



Toilet bowls are put to creative use at T-Bowl Restaurant.



A patron enjoying his meal.



Fancy your food in toilet bowl-shaped bowls?

I lift the lids of some of the seat to see what is underneath, and find most are empty with a few having surreptitiously been turned into dustbins, what with the cigarette butts, receipts, cigarette packets and assorted items of 21st century living that have ended up there.

The large tables for six resemble bath tubs with a glass top, so you can see what is below — basically, items from any typical bathroom like rubber ducks, toys, seashells, soap containers and the like. The tables for two are wash basins with a transparent glass top.

With your senses artfully diverted (or yuckily repulsed), you might not notice how the food is like. Actually, they taste OK even if the ice-cream is made to look like excrement and the sausages like stool!

Tan has created a trio of cartoon characters to promote his restaurants.

"The three cartoon characters are very popular! Their images

appear on menus, walls and souvenirs. They are the Toilet Brothers named Toilet Bowl, Shower and Shit," he beams.

The siblings are designed so you cannot mistake one for the other!

A fan club has grown around his restaurant and there is a currently a photo contest, on till May 23, which encourages participants to show off the weird things they can do with their food.

"Join our T-Bowl Facebook Photo Contest to win up to RM1,000," says Tan as he closes his menu which comes with a real toothbrush embedded on the cover. Perhaps he's mindful that patrons may need to clean out their mouth after a visit to his restaurant?

□ T-Bowl Restaurant has an outlet on 3rd Floor, Queensbay Mall, Bayan Lepas, Penang and on the 3rd Floor, Sungei Wang Plaza, Kuala Lumpur. Call 03-2141 1606 if you have any enquiries.