

‘Get addicted to Korean food’



Five-colored “bibimbap” or mixed Korean rice with vegetables available at Si-Wha-Dam

Courtesy of Si-Wha-Dam



An appetizer dish of shrimp in sauce, yam topped with salted pollack roe, and laver pancake filled with vegetables



Grilled short-rib patties or “tteokgalbi” with pine needles

Si-Wha-Dam celebrates Relais & Chateaux membership

By Kim Ji-soo
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The white stocky building of the restaurant Si-Wha-Dam located on the slanted slope of Mt. Nam seemed liked business as usual from a distance last Thursday. Up close, there was a quiet bustling as the restaurant that has become Korea’s first member of the Relais & Chateaux worldwide luxury hoteliers’ and restaurateurs’ association opened up to the press, the travel industry and the world.

The fine Korean restaurant that accentuates poems, paintings and stories about food is run by owners Oh Chung and his wife and the restaurant’s creative director Park Kyoung-won. Oh is also the CEO of the popular Korean eatery franchise Sinseon Seolleongtang. The restaurant was chosen as the country’s first member of the 60-year-old association in its annual congress held in November 2013.

That admission means that a white standing bulletin adorned with the Relais & Chateaux logo stood next to the existing Si-Wha-Dam brand and the restaurant and Park is now a “Grand Chef.”

Relais & Chateaux was founded in 1954 by a collection of luxury lodges

sprinkled along the “Route du Bonheur” from Paris to Nice. Six decades later, it has some 520 luxury hotels and gourmet restaurants in 64 nations, including Si-Wha-Dam. To mark the 60th anniversary, the associate hosted a Fellow Chef’s lunch on May 12 at Georges Blanc Parc & Spa, Vonnas, Ain, France.

Inside members from Volando Urai Spring Spa & Resort of Taiwan, Camp Jabulani of South Africa, Saint James Paris of France, Villa Cora of Florence, and Soneva of Thailand were mingling. Also present was Tadamasa Saito, head of Relais & Chateaux for Japan and Korea and owner of Myojikan in Nagano, Japan.

The restaurant made its name preparing President Park Geun-hye’s inauguration dinner. Korean Presidents have recruited hotels usually two months ahead of inaugural dinners but President Park turned to the much-smaller Si-Wha-Dam for hers. The President, whose policy priorities include a more collaborative relationship between small- and medium-sized companies and conglomerates, was won over by their passion. Oh and Park feverishly worked in just a span of 10 days to present the dinner that included a plate of dried fruit as a snack, then a

seafood appetizer, baked garlic milk porridge dubbed “Dangun Mythology,” “rice cake sandwich,” “multi-colored Korean kebab,” “spring flowers bibimbap,” and Korean snacks.

Those dishes were present at the Thursday, under the theme “Oh! Korea” with several variations in the mix of the ingredients. Early summer meant the color of plants deepens, and

the green leaves and flowers that were part of the dishes were bold and lush.

There are four courses at the restaurant, their names telling of the proprietor’s philosophy: “A Line of Poetry,” “A Piece of Painting,” “A Pleasant Story” and “Banquet for Gourmets.”

Si-Wha-Dam is known for resourcing local ingredients — magnolia flower and leaves, mugwort, lotus

leaves and ginseng. Using these ingredients, Park works with cooks to add flavor. The meal is then laid on matching ceramic plates, and highlighted with a flower decoration or poetry written in sugar powder to make the meal a work of art.

Just as she scours her garden and all of Korea to find the ingredients, Park said she will do the same when she

goes to participate in the U.S. Gourmet Festival in Napa Valley from Oct. 21 through Oct. 25 in collaboration with Auberge du Soleil.

“I cannot take these ceramic plates,” said Park. “So I will find local ingredients there to make Korean food, so that the people there will be thoroughly familiarized with Korean food,” she said.



Members of Relais & Chateaux taste a 10-course meal that was presented at Si-Wha-Dam last Thursday.

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