



Spanish Style

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TAKING THE opportunity of his late flight out of the country, we invited visiting chef Sergi Arola on a tour of Chinatown's wet market and unique shops.

Chef Sergi Arola of La Broche restaurant in Madrid, Spain was in Singapore spinning his own brand of culinary magic at Raffles Grill at Raffles Hotel for the World Gourmet Summit.

On a bright Sunday morning, he turned up raring to go, clad in black from top to toe with Gucci sunglasses, and shoes with soles made from Pirelli tires (the wheels that Ferrari sport cars run on). Chef Arola is a partaker of the good life, a supporter of Spanish fashion designers of whom a good many are personal friends. Of designer labels, he says, "It's worthwhile paying a little more for things that are of better quality and will last that much longer."

Walking around the Sago Lane wet market, we saw live frogs in cages and huge round basins of undulating live fish. Chef Arola showed acute interest and made a comparison with the produce markets they have in Spain, "We have such markets too, just that the farmers bring their produce to sell once a week." He was also intrigued by mangoes in little baskets laid out for sale, "These are mangoes? They look really different from the ones we have in Spain!"

We drew him into a Chinese medicine hall to show him dried seahorses which are used in soups, among other preparations. Chef Arola was really amused to be told that it apparently had aphrodisiac properties.

An avid collector of antiques, he peered into every antique shop and finally was so attracted by a selection of old posters of Shanghai women, that he stopped to pick out a couple. Entering the shop, he also expressed his liking for the hanging wall prints, and bought one of an inebriated Li Bai, one of China's most famous poets.

By request, Sri Mariamman Temple was the last stop of this express tour. Chef Arola had heard of this unique temple and was suitably entranced by the goings-on.

Alas, time passes when you're having fun. All too soon we had to relinquish him to his other plans and can only dream of visiting Spain!

