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It's an ice cream dream

After studying overseas, a dessert inventor has returned to Hong Kong to wow customers with cool flavours, writes **YP cadet Alex Wong**

In the eyes of ice cream guru Arron Liu Chi-leung all kinds of food can be used to flavour ice cream, but not every taste is a winner. From inventing, experimenting to refining, the creation of a new ice cream flavour can take up to 20 attempts. Liu, founder of the innovative Ice Cream Gallery, is the creator of some 600 varieties of ice cream, 100 of which are on sale at his stall in the Repulse Bay Arcade.

"Ice cream means a lot to me because my grandmother used to reward me with mango ice cream," Liu says. "It reminds me of my childhood."

Liu studied electronic media and photography at university, but it wasn't long before his desire to learn dessert-making was too strong to ignore. During summer breaks, Liu pursued his passion in Rome, where he learned the basic culinary skills.

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He continued his studies in France, where he learned from a top dessert-maker.

Back in Hong Kong, he opened his own ice cream parlour to fulfil his dream. The Ice Cream Gallery is one of the leading fine ice cream shops in Hong Kong. Here you can find the kind of ice cream that used to be served only in expensive restaurants.

Liu thinks that Repulse Bay is the perfect location for his shop. "I went for a suburban and idyllic part of Hong Kong. It fuels my imagination as an inventor."

Besides mainstream flavours such as

mango and red bean, there are exotic, savoury flavours such as black and white truffle, ginger, black vinegar and egg, ice wine, foie gras and lobster.

Liu is never content with his existing range. He adjusts his recipes according to customers' feedback while rolling out new flavours every month, if not every week.

White truffle is among the most popular flavours. With a crunchy texture, the ice cream radiates a seductive aroma. The least popular by far is Wagyu. The smoothness of this deluxe ingredient becomes too bland as an ice cream flavour.

For strawberry ice cream, Liu makes use of a centrifuge to dehydrate the watery fruit, and pumps in carbon dioxide to bond the ingredients together. Liu calls this "molecular gastronomy", a term more commonly used in fine dining.

He says his favourite flavour has always been mango, thanks to his grandmother's influence.

Liu points out that his ice cream is low in fat and sugar. It contains minimal preservatives, colourings and artificial chemicals so it is a healthier option for dessert fans.

But it's no surprise that staying natural has its costs. Liu says his production cost is twice that of industrial ice cream, which is made in bulk and

contains chemicals to preserve its taste and to stop its unfrozen water content from freezing. Fine ice cream can be stored in the freezer for only two weeks at most, while industrial ones can keep for up to two years.

He believes that only a business which keeps its integrity will truly be sustainable.

"To succeed, the most important thing for every business is to win the trust of its customers," he says.

Behind the scenes, it is Liu's family who are the first to try his exotic new creations. His wife, Irene Cheung Yuen-man, always gives honest feedback.

"My husband has respect for ice cream and his job," she says. "And I have respect for him."

