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"You would pay HK\$200 to \$300 for a multi-course meal," says Samanta Pong, co-founder of the Word of Mouth restaurant guides.

"It was good and it was honest," says her business partner, Fergus Fung. "That's not necessary the right approach," Pong adds. "Many of these places just didn't change their menus. You're talking about just one chef. His or her ability to innovate is limited -- there are only so many dishes they can make."

The latest trend, says the Word of Mouth duo, is for chefs from big-name hotel restaurants to branch out and open their own small restaurants, often in unlikely locations.

"People have different expectations now," says Pong. "Before, they wanted to be surprised. Now they want to be impressed."

