

Wine&Dine

the art of good living

March 2017

ISSUE #303

The Salt Issue

Celebrating 32 Years



**Salt of
the Earth**
Harvesting
from sun and
sea in Australia

**More Than
a Pinch**
The rise & rise of
gourmet salts

**The Depths
of Saltiness**
Chef André Chiang
shares six
stunning recipes

**The Salt
& Sweet of It.**

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Wine&Dine

March 2017 ISSUE #303

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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Joyceline Tully
MANAGING EDITOR

Made of sun and sea, salt is perhaps the most elemental of ingredients. In the kitchen, it's never the star yet unquestionably indispensable, armed with a magical ability to lift other ingredients and dishes from the pedestrian and the banal. Not just good for savoury dishes, salt also works magic with sweets as pastry chefs around the world now know. Sea salt flakes on deep dark chocolate is a wonderful heavenly thing. Ditto thick salted caramel on anything.

This issue, we pay tribute to this humble ingredient, without which many of our favourite dishes would be considerably diminished. As Ferran Adria pointed out in an interview with *Esquire*, salt is the only product that changes cuisine. Indeed, food without salt is unfinished, incomplete, and for food lovers, quite unthinkable.

Thankfully, chefs and home cooks are now spoilt for choice when it comes to salt. Beyond mere table salt, there's fleur de sel, smoked salts, oyster salt and more. Read all about the rise and rise of gourmet salts (p.40) and the painstaking labour of love that goes into their production in a remote outpost in Australia (p.46). Then join chef André Chiang as he explores the depths of saltiness (p.56)—through fermentation and pickling, via a clever twist to the classic salted duck egg, in a dessert, and last but not least, in the natural briny flavours of the sea. We also take a look at umami, that ephemeral fifth taste that's so often associated with salt and savoury food (p.50), and which makes life worth eating, as our contributing editor so eloquently puts it.

Enjoy!

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CALVIN TAN

is a veteran lensman with over 15 years' experience. He specialises in food photography and has shot for numerous F&B bigwigs and restaurants in Singapore and the region. Apart from photography, his passion is cycling and his bike du jour is a custom-made Serotta.



PATRICIA GUY

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SIM EE WAUN

has been a food and travel journalist for over 25 years. She started her food writing career in *Wine & Dine* magazine and eventually became the magazine's editor in the early 1990s. Since then she has helmed other titles and has also edited cookbooks including the classic series, *Best of Singapore's Recipes* by Mrs Leong Yee Soo. She recently co-authored *The Little Singapore Book*, a children's book on Singapore's history, and now juggles her time between the two genres.



JOYCE HUANG

was brought up on a diet of books and family dinner parties. It's hard to ascertain which came first, Joyce's love for words or her infatuation with food. Luckily, a writing career that started at local food magazine meant she didn't have to choose between either. Now as a freelance food, wine and travel writer, she can be found in various corners of the world digging into streetside fare, trawling museums and practising hand signals with locals.

ABOUT THE CHEF



Chef André Chiang of two-Michelin-starred Restaurant André is the chef behind this issue's cover dish. The 40-year-old, who honed his skills in the kitchen of Le Jardin des Sens in France, under the watchful eyes of chefs Jacques and Laurent Pourcel, is the perfect candidate for the job. After all, salt is an integral part of his culinary philosophy, which he calls Octaphilosophy (along with Pure, Artisan, South, Texture, Unique, Memory, Terroir).

His cover dish is Squid, which showcases the lovely briny flavours of the sea. "It's not just about how salty a dish is, or the different types of salt used," he explains. "It has to do with exploring the depths of saltiness... and how it spotlights the ingredients without overwhelming them, such that the two-dimensional becomes three-dimensional."

Garum, or fermented fish sauce is Chef André's seasoning of choice when it comes to adding a depth of saltiness to a dish. "It's natural, and it has so much flavour," he enthused. "It's probably the oldest MSG in the world!" **WD**

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PHOTO: CALVIN TAN



Get up close with chef André Chiang on www.wineanddine.com.sg!
Find out why 2016 was a watershed year in his career, what's next for him and Restaurant André, his latest culinary inspirations, and more.



Les Amis



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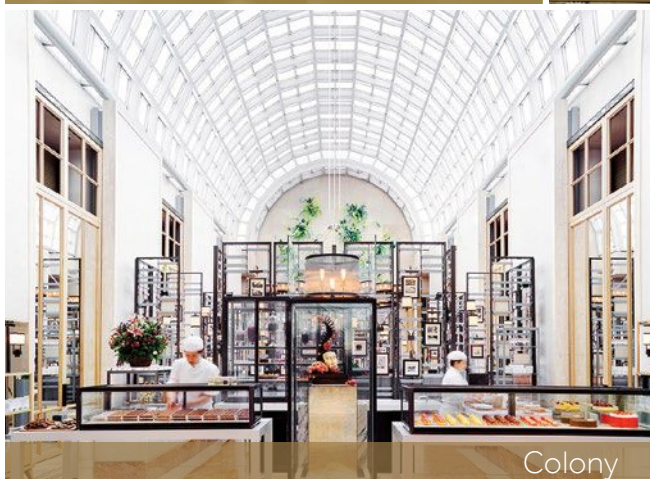
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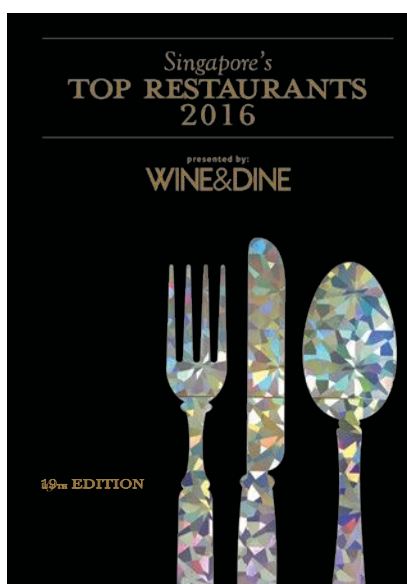
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youngs.com.sg

We just can't get enough of **The Summerhouse**, the charming F&B concept in **Seletar Aerospace Park (SAP)** by 1-Group. Housed in a sprawling conservation bungalow, there's Wildseed, a café by day and bar by night; and The Summerhouse dining room, a farm-to-table restaurant helmed by chef Florian Ridder, and even a flowershop that's decked out in whimsical blooms you'd want to take home.

It's not the only draw at Seletar. Other openings at The Oval @ SAP, touted as Singapore's next foodie enclave, are making it worth the trek to this part of the island. **Wheeler's Estate**—run by the same folks behind Wheeler's Yard in Balestier—comprises a modern Aussie restaurant, a café with decent brunch options and a bar. There's also **Di Wei Teochew Restaurant** and **Youngs Restaurant and Bar**, a contemporary European restaurant.

But the best part of SAP has to be the laidback vibes and lush green setting, which make it a perfect weekend hideout. We hear it gets super busy then, so be sure to make your reservos early.

TRENDING



018

① *Curious Palette*

Coffee Obsessed

Cafes for your cuppa when coffee becomes a science and your brew is all about precision roasting and ever more exotic beans

WORDS CHARLENE CHOW

www.wineanddine.com.sg



2 The Populus Coffee & Food Co.

The number of cafes serving up cracking speciality brews has been on the rise lately. No doubt, they are riding on the wave of a new tribe of coffee lovers who don't only see coffee as an artisanal product, they're also hungry to know about the details of every bean they drink, from harvesting to roasting to brewing. Here are a few pitstops we love.

3 Caffè Vergnano 1882 Singapore



4 The New Black

1. Curious Palette

Expectations are high for this cafe when the owner is Ryan Kieran Tan, the World Siphon Coffee Champion 2015, ASEAN Barista Champion 2013 and three-time Singapore National Barista Champion, amongst other accolades. Filter coffees here come in four brewing methods—aeropress, siphon, wave dripper and cold brew. We love their White Magic (\$6.90) made with 50 per cent Ethiopia Yirgacheffe Red Cherry and 50 per cent El Salvador San Carlos beans, milk and a touch of cream, giving it a smooth, rich, smokey, chocolatey flavour. Order a coffee flight—featuring two coffees of different styles and beans—and you'll enjoy a short tutored tasting by in-house baristas. Ditto for coffee-and-dessert pairing options. For a more in-depth education in coffee, sign up for their coffee-brewing classes. **64 Prinsep Street. Tel: 6238 1068; facebook.com/curiouspalette**

2. The Populus Coffee & Food Co.

The Populus Coffee & Food Co. at Neil Road is the flagship café of baristas Kang Yi Yang and Andrew Lek, co-owners of roastery 2degrees North Coffee Co. Its main draw are seasonal single-origin coffees such as Kenya Thiriku AB-fully washed (\$6.50) and Ethiopia Kochere Dumerso-natural (\$6.50), as well as other specialty coffee blends. Hearty eats such as pulled pork grain bowl (\$19.50) and buckwheat pancakes (\$20.50) are also on the menu.

146 Neil Rd. Tel: 6635 8420; thepopuluscafe.com

3. Caffè Vergnano 1882 Singapore

Enjoy Piedmontese espresso coffee at Caffè Vergnano 1882 Singapore, located at swanky South Beach. Here, coffee is slow-roasted in 18-22 minute cycles to extract the maximum flavour and aroma out of the beans. Must-tries include their signature 1882 espresso blend (\$3.50), and the Delizioso (\$5.50 regular; \$6.50 large), an espresso with foamed milk, Nutella and whipped cream. They also run workshops on topics such as latte art and coffee brewing.

#B1-17, 26 Beach Road, South Beach Avenue. Tel: 6385 5579; facebook.com/caffevergnanosg

4. The New Black

Coffee appreciation is boiled down to an exact science at The New Black in Raffles Place. Find interactive tablets with taste wheels explaining the different flavour

profiles of coffee while you sip your brew made with beans by artisan roasters from around the world. Some brands you will find here are Small Batch Roasters, Melbourne, Australia and Tim Wendleboe, Oslo, Norway, and Emilio Spezialitätenrösterei, Munich, Germany.

Republic Plaza, 9 Raffles Place. Tel: 6410 9318; thenewblack.coffee

5. The Coffee Academics

The Coffee Academics (TCA) has recently opened a new outlet, Nitro Pitstop at Raffles City, upping the ante with advanced levels of coffee exotica. Try their nitro coffee (\$10), pulled from a draft tap and served chilled, and signature coffee pepper agave (\$6), a latte with Mexican raw agave nectar and black pepper, or crafted hand brews like the Costa Rica Jaguar (\$6), made using the Caturra and Catuai varieties of Arabica coffee beans from the Los Santos region of Tarrazu. They undergo what is known as 'the honey process' to yield a fruity aroma of prunes and berries.

#B1-12, Raffles City Shopping Centre, 252 North Bridge Road. Tel: 6266 0560; the-coffeeacademics.com



5 The Coffee Academics

YOUR PERSONAL GUIDE TO MARCH



SOCIAL MARKET

4 to 5 March 2017

Open Farm Community (OFC), Singapore

Now into its eighth edition, Open Farm Community's Social Market returns with the best of local produce and products. Check out offerings such as Soi Coco coconut shakes, Kulhbarra barramundi and organic homemade granola from over 300 stalls. Apart from food, there are yoga classes on the outdoor lawn, an open-air cinema and gardening workshops conducted by Edible Garden City. While you're there, stop by and sample OFC's latest menus by executive chef Ryan Clift and new head chef Russell Misso using produce that is 90 per cent sourced from farms in Singapore and the region.

bit.ly/ofcsocialmarket8



Taste of Hong Kong

16 to 19 March

Central Harbourfront, Hong Kong

Asia's premium restaurant festival returns to Hong Kong for the second time. Restaurants making their debut are Kaum at Potato Head, Mercato, Okra, Rhoda and Zuma, while those returning from last year's lineup include Yardbird, Arcane, CHINO, Tin Lung Heen and Duddell's. There will be live entertainment to ramp up the atmosphere and plenty else to keep you busy including a gourmet market brimming with artisanal products like Dutch cheese, craft beers and handmade ice pops.

www.tasteofhongkong.com



Melbourne Food and Wine Festival 2017

31 March to 9 April

Melbourne, Australia

This year's Melbourne Food and Wine Festival promises to be something really special. Check out a special masterclass series featuring eight chefs whose restaurants have been honoured on the World's 50 Best Restaurants list, held in conjunction with the unveiling of this year's list in Melbourne on 5 April. You can also take your pick of seismic international collaborations, such as the four-hands dinner by Carlo Cracco, chef-owner of two-Michelin starred Ristorante Cracco in Milan and Australia's chef Guy Grossi of Grossi Restaurants.

melbournefoodandwine.com.au

RELAIS & CHÂTEAUX GOURMETFEST 2017

16 to 19 March

Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, USA

A gathering of Relais & Châteaux chefs and some of the most outstanding wine estates around the world awaits at this year's Relais & Châteaux GourmetFest 2017. Catch top chefs including Daniel Boulud from New York and Michael Tusk of Quince in San Francisco in action over four days and more than 18 events. A decadent highlight is the black truffle and black river caviar dinner, featuring chef Shinichiro Takagi of kaiseki restaurant Zeniya in Japan, chef Per Hallundbaek of Danish restaurant Falsled Kro and Chef Chris Kajioka of Hawaii's Hotel Wailea.

gourmetfestcarmel.com

SME Symposium 2017

Opportunities Amid Turbulence

27 March 2017, Monday

0800am Registration;

0900am - 1030am Dialogue Session

Nanyang Polytechnic

180 Ang Mo Kio Avenue 8, Singapore 569830

Highlights of this year's Symposium include:

- Dialogue with
NTUC Secretary
General, Mr Chan
Chun Sing
- Breakout sessions
with sector experts
from the Retail,
Logistics and Food
industry.



With mounting insecurity on global outlook in the regional and global economy, it is vital for businesses to look out for growth opportunities, especially the SMEs. This year's theme for the SME Symposium 2017 is "**Opportunities Amid Turbulence**" which will aim to address the global economic challenges and uncertainties ahead through the sharing of insights and strategies by business leaders and entrepreneurs.

**Take the step towards forging a stronger SME and workforce
to meet the challenges ahead!**

To sign up, please visit <http://www.ntucsmesymposium.com/>

Co-organised By:



Initiative By:



Presented By:



a sweet discipline

Fresh from representing Singapore at the Coupe du Monde de la Pâtisserie in France, pastry chef Edwin Leow of Le Méridien Singapore Sentosa shares his passions

INTERVIEW **CHARLENE CHOW**

For Edwin Leow, pastry chef at Le Méridien Singapore, Sentosa, pitting himself against the world's best spurs him on to reach greater heights in his craft. He cut his teeth at some of the finest pastry kitchens on the island, including St Regis Singapore and Fairmont Singapore, and has won various competitions and industry accolades. He has also represented the country on the international platform, including as part of the national team that was crowned overall champion (national team category) for Food and Hotel Asia's Culinary Challenge 2014 – Battle for the Lion.

Chef Leow's most recent international outing to represent Singapore was at the Coupe du Monde de la Pâtisserie (World Pastry Cup) finals in France earlier this year. Although he did not bring home the gold—the Singapore team came in ninth among 22 teams—it was, in his own words, a "prodigious experience".

I HAD TO LEARN ICE CARVING for the World Pastry Cup because it was a requirement for contestants to carve an ice sculpture 'live'. I was in charge of sculpting the Greek-inspired Griffin ice carving feature. It was a great challenge because ice is a very delicate material to work with.

COMPETITIONS BRING OUT THE BEST IN ME. They really push me to my limits. Mentors and senior chefs play an important role as their advice helps me to improve.

THE MOST CRUCIAL FACTOR TO WINNING AT INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS is to stay focused. It's also about how well you cope with challenging situations and make the best out of them.

I LIKE TO INCORPORATE LOCAL FLAVOURS IN MY PASTRIES. At Le Méridien Singapore Sentosa, I created an éclair inspired by kaya jam. I would like to try laksa next! It would be a wonderful challenge to incorporate its rich flavour into my desserts.

RESPECT is the most integral part of being a chef. It means taking a step forward to respect your fellow colleagues and associates, and earning their respect to be a truly successful chef in every aspect.

MY DAD IS MY GREATEST INSPIRATION. His passion for cooking sparked my interest in the culinary world. He is a great cook, and I learnt cooking from him before I ventured into pastry. **WD**





Signature Series

Twin Cooling Dual Zone

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3 Layered Z Glass



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3-fold Telescopic Sliding Shelves



Twin Cooling Fan



100% Wooden Beech Shelves

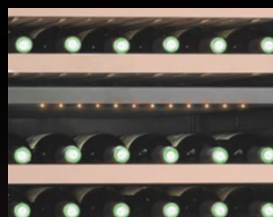


Anti Fingerprint Stainless Steel



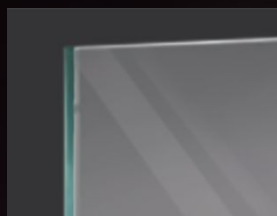
Twin Cooling Technology

Independent fan cooling system for each zone, providing more precise temperature throughout the whole chamber that reaches each wine bottle.



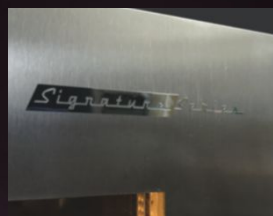
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Gerald Lu
Vice President
Sommelier Association
Of Singapore



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www.europace.com.sg

WORDS CHARLENE CHOW,
FOO JIA-EN, SIM EE WAUN
& JOYCELINE TULLY

KURO IZAKAYA

Joining the enclave of eateries at Suntec City is **Kuro Izakaya**—by day a ramen-donburi shop, by night, a gastro-bar cosily lit by furoshiki-inspired lanterns. The glass-lined contemporary restaurant, framed by tantalising rows of Japanese whisky, sake and shochu, serves up signature Kirin Krush, draft beer topped with a fluffy layer of frozen Kirin (\$8), and seasonal whisky tasting flights. For nibbles, we love their speciality Kuro kushiyaki platter (\$36), comprising bacon-wrapped enoki, hotate (scallop) bacon, chicken yakitori, grilled king oyster mushroom and kurobuta pork on skewers. Other must-try items include onsen tamago (\$12), a poached egg seated atop a bed of shirataki noodles adorned with yuzu peel, wasabi, ikura and baby cress; and smoked ajitsuke tamago (\$8), a hickory smoked egg with a runny yolk centre with Hokkaido potato salad. -FJE

#01-604/605 Suntec City East Wing Tower 3,
3 Temasek Boulevard. Tel: 6235 1066;
kuroizakaya.com.sg

Kuro kushiyaki platter



025

Porta

Park Hotel Clarke Quay has given its flagship dining option a facelift. Gone is buffet restaurant Brizo, and in its place is **Porta Fine Food & Import Company**, a chic diner serving mod-European cuisine. We like the breezy, Mediterranean feel that the white-washed walls and arched alcoves add to the main dining room. On the pass is Indonesian executive chef Michael Suyanto, who used to head the culinary team at Les Amis' Bistro du Vin. Dishes like ravioles de royans (\$22), mini cheese ravioli with Provençal vegetables, tomato coulis and pesto Genovese, hit the spot for their simplicity and flavour.

A retail corner showcases premium produce such as Terre Exotique's Chardonnay salt and Il Borgo del Balsamico's Il Tinello Yellow Label Balsamic Vinegar of Modena IGP. – CC

1 Unity Street, Level 1, Park Hotel Clarke Quay. Tel: 6593 8855

Spanish octopus



Bacchanalia

With a new chef on board and a new menu to boot, **Bacchanalia** looks all set to reinvent itself. Australian-born chef Luke Armstrong takes over from chef Ivan Brehm, who left big shoes to fill at the restaurant that he oversaw from inception to one Michelin star. Hopes are high for chef Armstrong, previously the head chef at London's Maze. Will he live up to expectations?

The key is not to expect the same-old. (Chef Brehm's signatures are still on the menu, but they will, sadly, be phased out in the coming months.) Chef Armstrong has a distinctly different style from his predecessor, with a decided penchant for a spectrum of bold flavours on his plate—think grass-fed tenderloin paired with thyme jus spiked with finely diced marrow, aubergine laced with Moroccan spices and aubergine pickle. His cuisine is classic European with a global twist, so expect produce and inspirations imported from around the world, and as evinced at our recent tasting, a healthy sprinkle of Japanese ingredients and influences.

Try the flame-grilled Japanese mackerel served with poached Brittany oysters on top of perfectly al dente orzo pasta and finished with a delicate saffron sauce. Beautifully cooked, light on the palate and well-considered in its balance of flavours, it's a dish we would come back for.

Tasting menus start from \$138 for five courses, and \$188 for eight courses. – JT
**39 Hong Kong Street. Tel: 9179 4552;
Bacchanalia.asia**

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Singapore's

TOP RESTAURANTS

2016

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Beni

Since its recent revamp, one-Michelin-starred Beni restaurant at the Mandarin Gallery has not only relocated to a lower floor, it has also lowered its prices. Its prix fixe menus now start from a very reasonable \$68 for a four-course weekday lunch, and ranges up to \$258 for dinner. (This compares well with its old prices that ranged from \$128 to \$298.)

But dining is still serious business here. At the eight-seat chef's counter, diners watch an almost-silent head chef Kenji Yamanaka prepare Japanese-accented French fare together with his equally stoic sous chef and pastry chef. But restaurant manager Antoine Capelli lightens the mood by explaining the courses in detail.

We are captivated by Vegetable Garden, a dish comprising 25 types of vegetables such as broccoli, black garlic, carrots and greens, served with a lemon beetroot purée, tomato crumble and clam emulsion sauce. Another stellar dish is Yamanaka's signature boeuf Ozaki wagyu A5, served with Hokkaido potato mousse, purple sweet potato chips, purple carrots, and apios, a legume grown in Japan. – CC

#02-37, Mandarin Gallery, 333 Orchard Road.

Tel: 9159 3177; beni-sg.com

Bouillabaisse



Botanico salad

Botanico at The Garage

There's plenty to like about **Botanico**, part of The Garage, One Rochester Group's new F&B concept at the Botanic Gardens. Housed in a 1920s Art Deco conservation building, Botanico is a 120-seater with an al fresco bar and outdoor seating for romancing the stars. But its lush dreamy setting aside, the real draw here is the food. Chef Antonio Oviedo, formerly of Spanish restaurant Binomio and Iggy's at Hilton Hotel, serves up an impressive modern menu that's seasonal, produce-driven and above all, pitch-perfect in its pairing of textures and flavours.

Winning dishes we can't get enough of: the sweet, crunchy carabinero prawns (\$28) cooked in an Inka grill and paired with saffron-scented bomba rice topped with dainty cubes of pork trotter; plump Hokkaido scallops (\$27) served with Jerusalem artichokes and spiked with Iberico lardo for a sinful oomph; and the lamb tartare (\$20) with mustard ice cream, tangy pickles, black olives arlette and its unexpectedly delicate melange of flavours. The star of the show, however, has to be the house-smoked Japanese sardines (\$20) served on a bed of salty chorizo bits, crispy croutons fried in Iberico fat and muscat grapes for a sweet note that lifts the dish.

It's not fine dining of the linen tablecloth variety, but the flavours are hearty and the prices, friendly—and that, to us, is very fine dining indeed. – JT

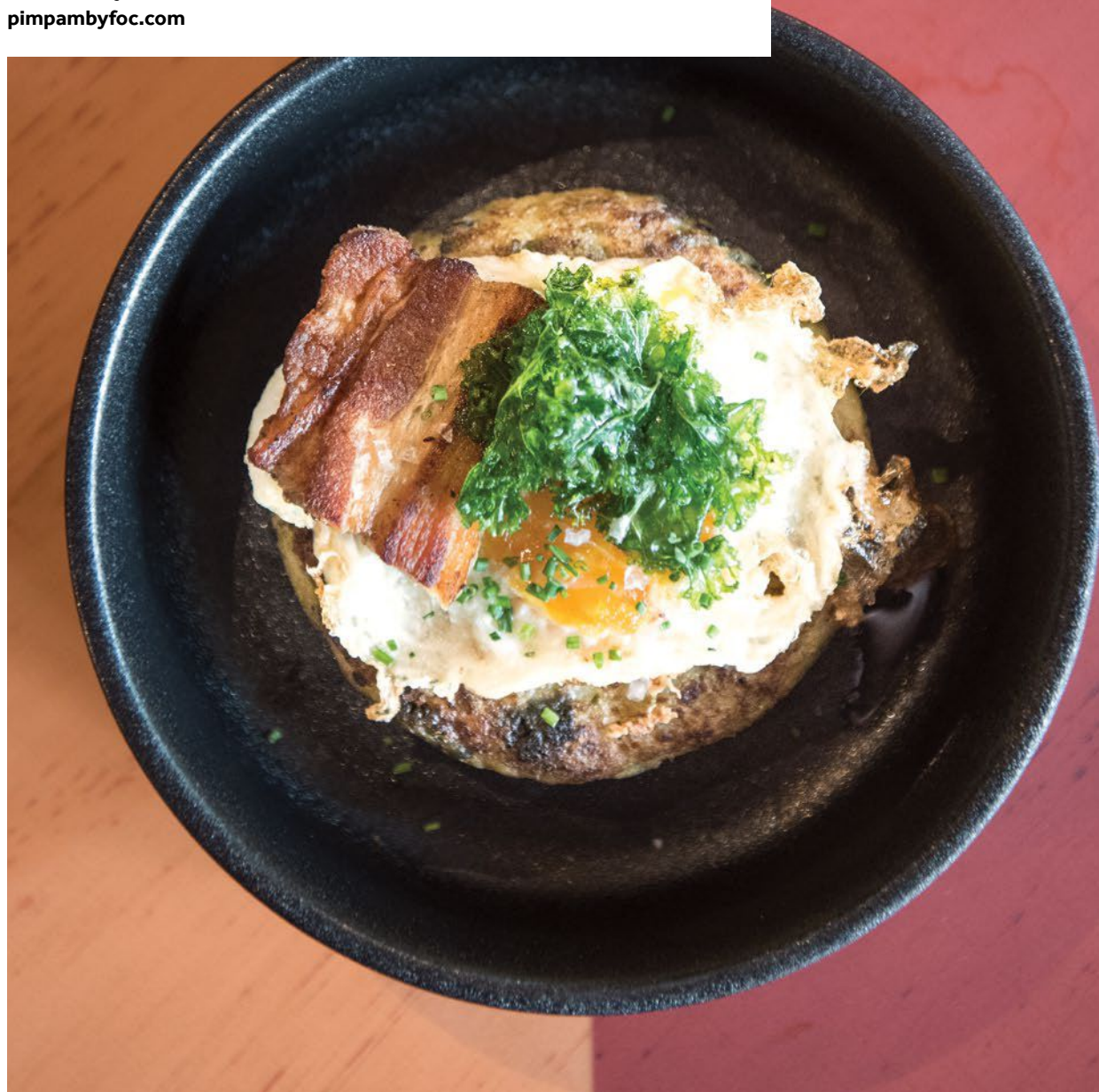
50 Cluny Park Road, Singapore Botanic Gardens. Tel: 6264 7978; thegarage.sg

Pim Pam

Stylish, family-friendly Spanish restaurant **Pim Pam** by FOC is a much-needed addition to the quieter end of Orchard Road. This breezy 215-seat restaurant with oversized figurines and bright furnishing sets a whimsical mood and serves seriously good food at very reasonable prices.

We love the trinxat (\$12), a comfort-laden dish of mashed potatoes, savoy cabbage, crispy pork belly and fried egg; and tinned cockles (\$12) accompanied by simple crusty bread with tomato (\$8). For mains, have the pork and scallop paella (\$22) that's uniquely cooked on a rectangular cast-iron pan, or a la launa style. Resembling a Japanese zen garden, this paella is a single, crisp layer of rice with lightly crowned scallops and juicy pork, which add depth to the flavour. The callos (\$10), or stewed beef tripe with pork trotters, chorizo bits, chickpeas and toasted bread is another must-have. For sweets, the churros (\$4 for two pieces) are positively delightful—crisp, light and just sweet enough.

Apart from lunch and dinner, it is one of the few restaurants serving breakfast from 8am with a take-away counter for the time-tied, a child-friendly space for families and great cocktails (lovely presentations), as well as over 130 wines. What's more, there's happy hour to boot between 3pm and 6pm. – SEW
#01-29 Claymore Connect, 442 Orchard Road. Tel: 6100 4242;
pimpambyfoc.com



Trinxat



Straciatella salad



At Rakuzen, we value tradition and quality. Our premium selection of Japanese dishes are all freshly prepared by our skilled chefs, using quality ingredients imported from Japan.

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9 Raffles Boulevard, #01-16/19
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<http://www.facebook.com/rakuzen.singapore>

TO MARKET

032

WORDS FOO JIA-EN



1. Grecian Gold

Add a dash of liquid ambrosia to your home-cooked meals with the **limited edition 100 per cent Pure Koroneiki extra virgin olive oil** from Papa's Grove. Only 1,000 of these hand-labelled bottles are available worldwide. Grown, crushed and bottled on the slopes of Peloponnese in Greece, Koroneiki olives produce high quality green-gold-coloured oil that is extremely low in acidity. With fruity notes of avocado and banana, it boasts a robust intensity and a smooth, buttery finish. **\$25, papasgrove.com**



2. Woodsy Living

Aomori Hiba wood houseware from Japan is now available at local design boutique Atomi. Historically used in the building of religious shrines and temples in Japan, this rare, fine-grained wood is prized for its unique anti-bacterial, insect-repelling and mould-resistant properties. Notably, Hiba wood products are durable and carry a calming, woodsy scent that deodorises naturally. Check out the Hiba wood rice paddle or beautifully crafted wood candles for a touch of minimalist functionalism in the kitchen and home. **From \$12, from Atomi**

3. Chromatic Harmonies

Glazed porcelain polychrome bowls from Middle Kingdom Porcelain add a splash of colour to any household. Taking on the tradition of imperial famille tableware, these bowls sport brilliant solid colours well-suited for the modern era. Be it as a serving dish or a decorative ornament, these bowls are multi-purpose and come in various sizes. **From \$30, from Scene Shang**

4. Cocoa Comforts

Drinking chocolate from Aussie brand Grounded Pleasures is just what you need to wind down after a long day out. They're 100 per cent natural and free from dairy and gluten. In addition to classic flavours like Original and Noir (dark chocolate), there are six other varieties available, such as all-time favourite Cinnamon Spice and the Mexican-inspired chili-infused variety. For the best results, be sure to blend in with some hot milk. **From \$11.30, from Huber's Butchery**

5. Grate Success

Minimise food preparation time with the **four-sided grater** from WMF's FUNctionals series. Made with the brand's signature rust-proof Cromargan stainless steel, the grater has sharp cutting surfaces in four different patterns on each side—coarse, fine, ribbon and slice. An integrated plastic tray conveniently collects the sliced ingredients below. **\$99.90, available at selected departmental stores; wmf.sg**

6. Nesting Season

Quench your thirst whilst on the move with bottled **bird's nest beverages** from local brand Kim. Each bottle contains 185ml of genuine bird's nest with no artificial preservatives and colouring. Believed to encourage appetite and boost one's immune system, bird's nest is considered a health tonic in traditional Chinese medicine. Kim's version comes in three flavours—

ginseng, rock sugar and sugar-free—in a dainty re-sealable glass bottle. **\$19.20 for a box of 6, available at major convenience stores and FairPrice.com.sg**

7. Cosmic Drinks

Healthy eating has never been so delightfully out of this world. Local brand The Juicy Way utilises an artful blend of freshly juiced fruit and vegetables to create **layered juices** à la pousse-café that are free from artificial sugars and colouring. Seven

flavours named after celestial phenomena are available, including The Big Bang, a dragonfruit, guava and honeydew concoction with a dash of blue pea flower for that brilliant tint of periwinkle; and The Interstellar, comprising mango and Thai milk tea.

From \$4.90 per 480ml bottle, facebook.com/thejuicywaysg

8. Barrel Aged

Aged cocktails are all the rage in high end bars. Try ageing your homemade Negroni, Old Fashioned, or even spirits like tequila and

whisky using **American white oak medium char barrels** with **black steel bands** from luxury barware brand UrbanBar. Practically a must-have in any bar geek's home arsenal, they are available in two sizes, 2L and 5L.

From \$250, ecproof.com

9. Tête-À-Tea

Alfi's stylish **1.0L Gusto Tea carafes** perk up the kitchen with its bold, streamlined design inside and out. The glass vacuum-insulated flask comes with an integrated stainless steel tea filter that works with both tea leaves and bags, and can brew up to eight cups of tea at one go. Choose from three gorgeous

colours: fire red, sweet mango and alpine white.

\$139, available at major departmental stores; thermos.com.sg

10. One Hob, One Hearth

Fit out your home with the kitchen of your dreams with **Frames by Franke**. There's no need to worry about compatibility—simply pick out your favourite sink, hob, hood and oven from over 60 individual components in this range, and you'll find they coalesce seamlessly with each other to become a fully-integrated, intelligent kitchen system. Avid hosts will appreciate Frames by

Franke's unique mood lighting options that'll transform the kitchen with a press of the button.

Price upon request, Franke

11. More Cheese, Please

Cheese aficionados will love **AOP Reblochon Fermier cheese** from gourmet grocer Secrets Fine Food. Available in 500g wheels, this soft, buttery cheese originated from the French Alps and is made from raw cow's milk. It is best enjoyed with potatoes and summer fruit, and is a lovely addition to the cheese platter.

\$42, from Secrets Fine Food





Wallet-Friendly Omakase for Food Lovers

Sushi Kou demonstrates that good food does not have to break the bank

The path leading to Sushi Kou at Orchid Hotel in Tanjong Pagar usually brings you past snaking lines of people queuing to get into the various Japanese eateries nearby. Once inside Sushi Kou though, you are greeted by a tranquil atmosphere and an intimate setting. At this 40-seater restaurant, take a seat at the dining tables, or perch at the 14-seater sushi counter which puts you close to the action at chef Kanazawa Homare's culinary theatre.

The main attraction here is chef Homare's six-course omakase menus, which start from an incredibly attractive price of \$50. There are \$80 and \$100 options, too. (The latter comes with grilled Kagoshima wagyu ribeye.) Sushi Kou's omakase usually comprises an appetiser, sashimi, a grilled dish, fried dish, braised dish, sushi and dessert. What goes into each dish is decided upon by the chef based on the fresh ingredients that he gets his hands on that day. With much of his seafood delivered from Tokyo's famous Tsukiji

Market twice a week, arriving on Tuesdays and Fridays, you can be sure that freshness and quality are paramount here.

In the culinary tradition of Japan, chef Homare's menu is deeply respectful of the seasons. For the month of March, expect seafood that are at their best in Spring, such as zuwagani nigori (snowcrab), sawara (Spanish mackerel), tai (white snapper) and shima aji (yellow jack).

To complement the food, Sushi Kou's drinks list offers a curated list of special seasonal sakes. Look out for shinbun sake—literally 'newspaper-wrapped' sake—from Nagano; and tokobetsu junmai nama sake, a special unpasteurised pure rice sake from the Ohyama brewery in Yamagata prefecture. The sake menu also comprises over 12 types of premium-grade sakes from renowned Japanese breweries such as Dassai, Kotsuzumi and Ichinokura.

Well-priced a la carte menus and bento sets (\$18 to \$39) are also available.



**01-16 Orchid Hotel,
1 Tras Link
Tel: 6444 8433;
Find Sushi-kou on
Facebook**



Salt Into the Wound

Well-trained and empowered restaurant staff can turn a bad situation into a good one with some quick thinking. If only that happens more often

WORDS **SIM EE WAUN**

A young couple was at the table next to us at a casual steak restaurant one evening. We noticed them as we came in. The lady was nursing her glass of red wine, now half-empty, while her boyfriend's beer mug sat empty. They had clearly been there for quite some time before we arrived. Yet when we got our appetiser half an hour later, they were still waiting for theirs. Then our main course arrived. At that point, the young man called to a waiter to ask about their order. There was some hushed, pointed conversation, a flurry of apologies and it turned out that the kitchen had completely forgotten about their order. To my surprise, when asked if they wanted to continue waiting, the couple said they would wait. And they were polite about it, too. Some time after that, their dinner finally arrived, almost an hour since we arrived. If it had been me, I would have been extremely upset. Yet there they were—calm and positively nice about the whole thing. In my view, these were dream customers every restaurant should be falling over themselves to serve. But what did the wait staff do? Nothing beyond the necessary of getting their food onto the table.

If the manager had been worth his salt, he could have given them a couple of drinks on the house and taken the opportunity show off their signature cocktails perhaps, and hopefully win them over as regular customers. By doing nothing beyond the minimum, it's likely these nice people will not return. Ever.

There could be two things that held the staff back from being absolutely stellar about service and recovery: insufficient training—a situation of epidemic proportions in F&B Singapore—or they may not be empowered to make snap decisions to turn this situation into a better one. The former can be fixed, but the latter requires a broader mindset change. Instead of seeing it as 'giving up' two glasses of wine and a few dollars of profit, management can see it as a small but effective investment in securing more business and generating loyalty in the longer term. Who knows, these people may even bring their friends next time and buy a couple of bottles from the restaurant.

One of the greatest feats of service recovery I witnessed was at a restaurant called Locavore in South Australia. On the night we were there, the restaurant was desperately shorthanded—only one chef in the kitchen and one waiter in the front. It was a Tuesday night in Adelaide Hills, and the restaurant was surprised by a full house. What these two men did was simply amazing. While stressed and working fast, they had their wits about them. They first went table to table explaining the situation, apologising and letting people know things will be slow going. But they plied us with wine on the house, and as the evening wore on, we all eventually got our meal with both the waiter and the chef serving, pouring and clearing the dishes. We paid our bill and left a generous tip to boot. I think most customers did that too that night.

The thing is, most decent people can understand that things go wrong sometimes. With a sincere apology, people will generally be forgiving. But when the service staff pretend it didn't happen, or brush it off without acknowledging the inconvenience it has caused to customers, that's when feathers get ruffled.

Offer something for service recovery. A small touch of acknowledgment goes a long way—a free scoop of ice cream, 10 per cent off the bill, appetiser on the house. It's really a matter of thinking on your feet, being proactive and knowing how to turn a bad situation into a good one. Unfortunately, for all the sophisticated restaurant scene we have here and increasingly savvy customers, service standards have quite a bit of catching up to do. **WD**

FRAME BY FRAME

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From charting the rise of gourmet salts and mapping the elusive fifth taste known as umami to exploring the depths of saltiness...

The Salt Issue FEATURE


The Rise Of Gourmet Salt

Premium salts have become pantry staples for chefs and serious home cooks, but they do a lot more than just add a salty touch

J.Q. Dickinson Salt-Works' hand-harvested salt makes the perfect finishing touch to any dish, including steak.

WORDS **SASHA GONZALES**

www.wineanddine.com.sg



You might not think of salt as anything more than a seasoning, but there was a time when the mineral was so highly prized that it was treated as a commodity. In the 13th century, Venetians travelled to Constantinople (now Istanbul), where they bartered their salt for the exotic spices of Asia. And as far back as 1,000 years ago, salt merchants established salt roads or trade routes which they used to transport salt to the areas that lacked it. Among the most important routes were the ones that spanned from Egypt to Greece, and from Morocco to Timbuktu on the southern edge of the Sahara.

So valuable was salt, in fact, that not only was the mineral heavily taxed in some areas, but at one point, it was also traded for twice the price of gold. In ancient Greece, slaves were traded for salt (the expression “not worth his salt” stems from this practice). During the Anglo-American War of 1812, soldiers received salt brine as payment because the government could not afford to give them money. And in Abyssinia and certain parts of central Africa, slabs of salt were the official currency. Throughout history, wars were fought and revolutions started over salt.



Before refrigeration, the mineral was also used as a preservative. It removed moisture from food, creating a dry environment that inhibited the growth of mould and bacteria. Salt was also combined with vinegar to make brine, which was used to pickle fresh food so that it would last longer.

TABLE SALT VS. GOURMET SALT

These days, while salt is no longer used as currency, it continues to be valued in the culinary world. But we're not talking about regular white table salt; more and more chefs and adventurous home cooks are turning to gourmet salt to season their dishes.

Traditional table salt comes from the sea or from underground salt mines. The salt is washed, cleaned and dried to eliminate any impurities, and anti-caking agents like calcium sulphate—or worse, a toxic chemical called ferrocyanate—are then added to keep the salt dry and prevent it from clumping. This refining process strips away some of its minerals, leaving just pure sodium chloride that can result in a harsh or unpleasant taste that can ruin the flavour of a dish.

“Processed table salt tastes ‘flat’ compared to naturally produced salt,” says Nancy Bruns, co-founder and CEO of J.Q. Dickinson Salt-Works, based in West Virginia in the US. “Once you’ve tasted natural sea salt, it’s hard to go back to the highly refined, industrially produced variety. The difference in taste is substantial. There’s a complexity of flavour to natural sea salt that simply doesn’t exist with industrial salt.”

Andrea Siebert, founder and managing director of Marisol, which works with traditional saltpan producers in southern Portugal to create superior-quality Atlantic sea salt and fleur de sel, agrees. “It’s all about the taste,” she says. “Gourmet salt just tastes better than regular salt, and so does the food that is prepared with it.”

WHAT IS GOURMET SALT?

Salt is found naturally in different parts of the world, and like fine wine, its characteristics are defined by the region where it is produced. Salt is mined in various ways depending on the type of salt in question, and its flavour is largely influenced by two factors: the shape of the crystal and the impurities (microbes and dirt) left behind through minimal processing.

With so many varieties available, shopping for gourmet salt can be daunting and confusing. Each type imparts a unique flavour, and sometimes even texture and appearance.

Sea salt: Any salt labelled ‘sea salt’ must be made from seawater. The water is channelled into small ponds and the water is left to evaporate over a period of time. There are two evaporation methods—forced evaporation and solar evaporation.

“The first involves heating the seawater until it evaporates, leaving only salt grains, while the second uses the sun and the wind to evaporate the seawater,” says Jessica Abel, whose company Saltwest Naturals produces sea salt using both methods. “Due to the climate where we are in Vancouver Island, Canada, we can only produce small amounts of solar-evaporated salt between March and October. We rely on forced evaporation to produce our salt year-round.”

Sea salt can be fine or coarse in texture. It adds a salty burst of flavour and is ideal for cooking with or finishing a dish.

Flake salt: This variety may occur naturally, but some companies make their flake salt by cooking and then evaporating the brine. The flakes differ in shape and size, from small pyramid-like crystals to larger flat shavings. Flake salt has a concentrated salty taste so it makes an excellent finishing touch to food. The best part is: only a tiny amount is needed. The crystals give dishes a crunchy texture.

Murray River Gourmet Salt Flakes, produced by Murray River Salt in Victoria, Australia, can be used in cooking or as a finishing salt. The company’s marketing manager, Jane Schmidt says that the product, which comes from the salty Murray River beds, is lower in sodium than other salt products and contains trace amounts of magnesium, potassium, calcium and iodine. This results in a subtle flavour that enhances, rather than overpowers, a dish.

Fleur de sel: Fleur de sel, which means ‘flower of salt’, is the thin, crusty layer of salt that forms on the surface of seawater as it evaporates. As this layer is quite fragile, it has to be harvested by hand—either raked in from the water, as is

Top

Brine entering the Murray-Darling Basin in Australia. It will flow down to crystallisers to be turned into salt

Opposite page, from top left

Processing salt at J.Q. Dickinson Salt-Works; Harvesting fleur de sel in southern Portugal for Marisol; Crystallised salt waiting to be harvested and processed



Salt Emporium

The next time you're vacationing in Okinawa, drop by Ma-suya on Heiwa Street, Naha City. This is where you will find more than 500 kinds of salt from Okinawa and around the world, including Bolivia, the Himalayas and Europe.

The shop is owned by Choji Nishizato, a native of Miyakojima island, Okinawa. His company, Paradise Plan Co. started making 'yukisio', or snow salt, from Miyakojima in the 1990s. With a texture that is as fine and light as snow (hence its name), the salt has a place in the Guinness Book of Records for salt containing the highest number of minerals—18 kinds including sodium, potassium, calcium and iron. Made with underground seawater that seeped through rocks that were once coral reef, yukisio does not taste too salty and is even a little sweet.

There are plenty of other specialty salts to check out at Ma-suya including oyster salt made from the extract of fresh oysters from the Seto Inland Sea. One ton of oysters only yields four kilograms of this premium salt. Another bestseller is magma salt, a rock salt made with the magma of the Himalayas. Says Shiei Shu, the international sales manager of Paradise Plan Co., "This salt smells like hot springs and tastes like boiled egg. But add a little bit of it to steaming rice and you'll end up with more umami flavour."

3-2-59 Makishi, Naha City, Okinawa, Japan. Tel: +81 098-860-6405; ma-suya.net



Master of Brine

Up close and personal with Anantara Mai Khao Phuket Villas' salt guru, Natthawut Supim

What sort of training does one need to be a salt guru?

Most of the training I got was from a salt supplier that we work with. They trained me and told me about the characteristics of each salt.

My day-to-day work is mostly spent at dinner service, presenting the salts and matching them with dishes that guests have ordered.

Why the need for a dedicated salt guru at your restaurant?

Our restaurant is named 'Sea.Fire.Salt'. Sea refers to our menu, which is heavily influenced by items from the sea; fire as the style of our cooking is over a charcoal grill, and salt because we have around 17 types of salt from around the world for use in the restaurant. We present our grilled items on a Himalayan salt brick that is heated up to 200 degrees Celsius.

How effective are specific salts in enhancing flavour?

Some salt really gives impact to a dish. For instance, you may think that a Cyprus black lava flake salt is simply a Mediterranean flake salt mixed with activated charcoal, but the beautiful colour is not the only benefit of the added charcoal. It also gives the food a unique taste and acts as a natural detoxifier.

Which are two of the most unusual salts in your salt trolley?

I would say tom yum salt. It is one of the signature salts we make using the same ingredients base as tom yum. We dry and grind them down, and leave [the mixture] for a few months in Thai sea salt with herbs. It's great for grilled items and adds a touch of Thai. Even if it has become a little common now, another of my favourite is the Himalayan pink salt, because it is a pure, hand-mined salt found naturally deep inside the pristine Himalayan mountains. The high-mineral crystals range in colour from sheer white to deep reds, which indicates up to around 84 trace elements and iron. The redder their hue, the higher the amount of minerals, especially iron.

What kinds of food would you usually pair these salts with?

Tom yum salt goes well with king prawns, whole baked fish and good cuts of beef. Himalayan pink salt is more versatile. It is great with all seafood and meats, but is also mild enough for some cocktails and desserts.

Name three gourmet salts you would recommend for the home cook.

I recommend the Himalayan pink salt. Another is the Vintage Merlot salt, which is amazing with a good steak or lamb. It has a rich burgundy colour and oak flavour. The Durango hickory smoked sea salt adds a whole different taste to barbecues. Always remember: salt is a seasoning to enhance a dish, not overpower it.



done in France, or collected using special sieves, as is the practice in Portugal. The environmental conditions have to be perfect (sunny and windy) for the salt to crystallise, or 'bloom'.

Because of how it forms, fleur de sel is produced only in small amounts. This, combined with its labour-intensive method of harvesting, makes it the most expensive of sea salts. Fleur de sel is produced in Europe and the Americas. Its high moisture content puts it in the 'wet salt' category.

"Fleur de sel crystals are less compact and dissolve more easily, so they have that melt-in-the-mouth quality," says Siebert. Use fleur de sel as a finishing flourish to give an earthy, delicate saltiness to food.

Sel gris: This is French for 'grey salt'. It is the salt that is harvested from beneath the fine, top layer of fleur de sel. This moist, coarse-grain salt is grey in colour, which comes from the clay found at the bottom of the salt flats. (The salt is allowed to come into contact with the bottom of the salt flats before being raked.) It is hand-harvested in the same way as fleur de sel. Sel gris



has a high mineral content, giving it an earthy, savoury flavour. It is an excellent all-purpose salt.

Coloured salt: Gourmet salts are available in a wide range of colours—think Himalayan pink salt, Persian blue salt, Bolivian rose salt, black charcoal salt and Hawaiian red clay salt, to name a few. Some of these are naturally-occurring, like Himalayan black salt, which comes from the veins that run through Himalayan pink salt, while others contain an extra ingredient that gives them their colour, like Cyprus black lava sea salt, which is made from Mediterranean white sea salt flakes spiked with purified volcanic charcoal. These salts embody different flavours, depending on their colour and provenance.

Flavoured salt: Many gourmet salt companies also produce flavoured varieties—these may include smoked salt, and salt blended with dried herbs or other ingredients.

Saltwest Naturals, for instance, makes roasted garlic and onion infused, and salted aramel chocolate flavoured salts—these are made from Canadian sea salt dressed with various flavourings. J.Q. Dickinson Salt-Works' Smoked Salt is slowly smoked for three days over local apple wood, giving it an interesting smoky character.

Rock salt: This variety is obtained from salt mines that were created by ancient evaporated oceans. Rock salt is usually sold in an organic, unprocessed form and is seldom used directly in cooking. However, the large, pebble-like chunks are often used to create a 'bed' on which to serve other ingredients, such as oysters in the shell.

ENHANCING INGREDIENTS

Siebert says that gourmet salt imparts more than just saltiness to food. Thanks to its rich mineral

composition and natural moisture, it accentuates the inherent flavours of a dish. "You don't want to ruin the flavour of a good cut of meat or an expensive fish, for instance, with cheap table salt," she says.

Chef Han Li Guang, owner of Restaurant Labyrinth in Singapore, says that salt is an intriguing ingredient to work with because it enhances the umami quality of certain foods. However, he tends to use it more as a secondary seasoning agent than a primary one. He explains: "When it comes to seasoning my dishes, I'm quite fond of salted products, like salted fish and salted eggs. Salt brings out the natural 'umami-ness' of those ingredients. When added to dishes, these ingredients give the food a unique salty edge. At the moment, I'm experimenting with salty soya crystals, a by-product of soya sauce making. I'll be using the crystals in stocks for my next menu."

Ioannis Stefanopoulos, executive chef of Alati, a Greek restaurant on Amoy Street, is a fan of fleur de sel from Kythira, an island in Greece. "This to me is the king of salts," he shares. "It's hand-harvested and unprocessed, and it tastes like the Aegean and Ionian Seas. I like adding just salt and rosemary to a rack of lamb, and for salads, nothing's better than a sprinkling of oregano, black pepper, extra virgin olive oil and salt flakes."

To make the salt-baked fish dish Alati is known for, chef Stefanopoulos mixes coarse salt with egg white and then encases a whole fish in the salty paste. "The salt crust seals in all the moisture and flavour from the fish as it bakes, and the result is a dish that's not only delicious but also succulent and aromatic," he says. "Salt is such a simple ingredient and you really don't need a lot to enhance a dish's flavours. I call it Mother Nature's gift because it brings food to life." **WD**

Opposite page

Fleur de sel, or flor de sal in Portuguese, is categorised as a wet salt because of its high moisture content

From bottom right

Murray River Salt flaked salt; Saltwest Natural's handcrafted canadian sea salt flavoured with caramel chocolate; Crunchy flaked salt adds an interesting texture to salads and other dishes



Salt of the Earth

This Australian family-run firm tells all about their business of salt, sea and wind

WORDS **CHARLENE CHOW**

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“To make great salt, you need very clean water, lots of sun and lots of wind,” says Alexandra Olsson, company director of Olsson’s Salt. The Australian company has been making salt since her grandfather Norman, uncle Malcolm and father Charles started Olsson Industries in 1949. Prior to that, her Swedish great-grandfather ran a grocery business when he settled in Parramatta, Sydney in the late 1800s.

The Olsson family’s journey with salt began with making pressed mineral and salt blocks for livestock. They produced the first salt block in Australia in 1950 to provide nutritional supplements for sheep and cattle affected by heavy droughts at that time. Making salt blocks for livestock still make up over half of their business, but since 1964, they have been making solar sea salt for human consumption, using a technique called ‘solar evaporation’.

LETTING NATURE DO ITS WORK

The process is straightforward enough. First, natural seawater is stored in large ponds called ‘primary ponds’ which have rich flora and fauna and



From top

Olsson's fleur de sel (left) and blossoms; Olsson's Family Portrait circa 1920s; Salt harvested from salt works at Whyalla

Opposite page

Crystalliser pond where the evaporated seawater forms salt and is subsequently harvested





are a sanctuary for sea birds. Alexandra stresses, "The success of the ecosystem within the primary pond is of paramount importance to the quality of sea salt produced. An abundance of micro-organisms help to filter and naturally clean the seawater on its way to becoming beautifully pure sea salt."

Next, the seawater stored in the primary pond is evaporated in successive ponds anywhere between nine and 18 months, until the brine or water heavy with salt is fully concentrated. Salt crystals start to form when the brine concentration reaches 25.8 per cent sodium chloride. At this stage, the brine is moved to a 'crystalliser pond' where the salt begins to "drop out of the water", forming a layer of salt on the pond. It is then scooped up, washed in seawater, dried and packaged.

The Olssons put good geography down as one of their most decisive strengths. One of their salt works is located on the Eyre Peninsular, in a remote region north of Whyalla, South Australia. Whyalla has over 300 days of sunshine a year and such ample wind that they host the national kite-boarding championships. Sitting on a vast tidal marsh called 'False Bay' also allows them to naturally capture seawater from the Great Australia Bight. Salt produced here, says Alexandra, is "very pure, with an almost sweet sea salt tang". Over at their other salt works at Port Alma, Queensland, seawater from the Great Barrier Reef is warmer and contains more minerals. Salt made there consequently "has a higher marine mineral and

trace element content which results in a stronger-flavoured salt with a greyish hue".

But the craft of making good salt is not without its challenges. One of it is warding off the effects of rust, easily formed from the combination of salt, wind and humidity. Another is dealing with natural disasters. For instance at the Port Alma salt works, their greatest challenge each year is repairing the damage caused by tropical cyclones to buildings, machinery and salt pans.

RIDING THE GOURMET WAVE

About five years ago, Olsson's launched sea salt flakes, judging that it would be well-received by the Australian gourmet community and their rising appreciation of gourmet salt. Alexandra's father, Charles, was trained in the tradition of salt-making at Les Salins du Midi in Languedoc, France, and he was determined to make sea salt flakes, or fleur de sel, in the French tradition. He took over 10 years to perfect it.

"This grade of sea salt flakes is hand-harvested from the very top of the flaker pan and is very fragile," shares Alexandra. "Underneath this layer of large flat flakes is a layer of fluffy balls of salt that we have call 'blossoms' because they remind us of wattle blossoms. The blossoms are more robust than the fleur de sel and are recommended for curing, brining, mixing and also for the table." Gourmet sea salt flakes now account for over five per cent of Olsson's overall business, but they expect this figure to rise as chefs and gourmets become more well-versed in the use of premium salt flakes.

Since then, the company has launched other varieties of gourmet salt like macrobiotic salt (unrefined, unwashed and without additives) and black truffle salt in 2013. Last year, they launched a red gum smoked sea salt that's made by cold-smoking their sea salt flakes on native red gum wood for 72 hours. Their project to make an all-out Australian smoked salt began when chef Ross Lusted, of three-hatted restaurant The Bridge Room, approached Alexandra three years ago looking for uniquely flavoured smoked salt. "I had been toying with the idea of doing a smoked salt for years but this galvanised me into action. I was committed to finding an Australian hardwood to smoke on, rather than take the easy route and use wood chips imported from the US or Europe."

They eventually decided on red gum for its deep flavour and aroma reminiscent of Australian campfires. Charlie Costelloe, a master smoker from Pialligo Estate Smokehouse Canberra was then brought onboard to cold-smoke the salt in the traditional northern European style. The method

Above

Charles and
Alexandra Olsson



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**Alexandra's serving suggestions
for Olsson's red gum smoked
sea salt:**

- Add to soft butter and serve on barbecue corn-on-the-cob or simply with bread
- Sprinkle a little onto a fresh tomato salad or over vegetables before grilling
- Use it to replace regular salt when making salted fudge or salted caramel

***Clockwise
from top***

Olsson's red gum smoked salt; Olsson's hand-harvested sea salt; Smoker at Pialligo Estate Smokehouse Canberra used to smoke Olsson's Red Gum Smoked Salt

imparts all the flavour from the wood without retaining bitterness from the heat of the fire. And it is also a nod to the Olssons' Nordic heritage. The result is a versatile smoked salt, dark and rich with complex aromas that can go with everything from meats, poultry and seafood to salads, soups, sauces and vegetables.

Apart from The Bridge Room, top restaurants in Australia that use Olsson's salt include Dinner by Heston Blumenthal, Quay, Icebergs Dining Room and Bar, Aria restaurant, Bennelong and Pilsu at Freshwater, to name a few. The likes of Whitegrass by chef-owner Sam Aisbett in Singapore also use it.

We can expect more from Olsson's in our own backyard this year—they are finalising an agreement with a key distributor in Singapore and Hong Kong that will help them connect with chefs and retailers directly to supply their gourmet salts to Southeast Asia. **WD**

Magical, Mythical Umami

That elusive, rich fifth taste that makes life worth eating

WORDS **SIM EE WAUN**

Oyster sauce, seared steaks, parmesan, bacon, fish sauce, bak kwa. These are wonderful things that make life worth eating, and the list goes on—a juicy burger, earthy shiitake mushrooms, meaty broths and gravies, an extravagant poon choy, the homey comfort of oyster omelette. The magic touch that binds them all, then tantalisingly onto our tongues is umami, that once mythical, magical fifth taste that brings flavour beyond the basic foursome of sweet, salty, sour and bitter. In the realm of umami, the flavours are deep, comforting, more-ish and savoury, but notoriously elusive to pinpoint—so much so that it was officially discovered only relatively recently in 1908 by Kikunae Ikeda, a chemist at Tokyo University, and the father of MSG.

050

As the story goes, this man of science had noticed a certain savoury ‘deliciousness’ in produce like asparagus, tomatoes, meat and cheese, and most particularly in kombu, the seaweed on which dashi—the Japanese stock—is based. Homing in on kombu, the quintessential Japanese ingredient, Ikeda discovered that glutamate, an amino acid, was the source of this savoury sensation. Identifying it as the elusive fifth taste, he called it ‘umami’.

UNDERSTANDING UMAMI

Describing the taste of umami isn’t easy. “Umami is a taste sensation that provides a pleasant savoury taste profile and enhances the intensity of a dish, making it tastier and desirable to eat. Once tasted, it is easy to recognise,” says Laith Wahbi, the global product manager for savoury, at Givaudan, the world’s largest manufacturer of flavours and fragrances. Indeed, it is still not quite as straightforward as ‘bitter’ or ‘sweet’. Suffice to say, if you want to taste umami in its purest form, have a helping of MSG.

While detractors say the taste of umami is all hocus-pocus, and argue that it’s just an effect of saltiness, science removes all doubt. “Umami is definitely a unique taste sensation in its own right. The taste receptors responsible for sensing umami have been identified in the human tongue, so it is without a doubt, a true taste sensation,” says Wahbi.

Understanding umami is a little tricky if you want to get to the nuts and bolts. According to Paul Breslin, one of the first scientists to prove the existence of umami taste receptors, the amino acids have to be ‘freed’ in order to release the umami. Cooking, ageing and fermenting do just that. That’s why an aged piece of steak tastes better than one that’s not, and why all manner of cheeses and fermented fish sauces—so widely used in Asian cuisines—taste so good. Think about it: raw meat does not have that umami taste. Indeed, our distant ancestor who discovered fire must also have been the first to appreciate that the accidentally seared leg of mammoth was much tastier than a raw one, albeit freshly skinned.

Ikeda discovered that when foods age or ferment or cook, the proteins within it undergo a molecular change. They break into smaller bits of which one of them is the amazing L-glutamate, the one tiny magical unit under the heavens from which umami bursts forth—like the Big Bang. Once it binds itself to receptors on our tongue, it sparks off a chain reaction of processes that ultimately gives us that lovely umami taste.

The magic of umami does not end there. When several umami-laden ingredients are combined, they enhance each other with even more flavour than the sum of their parts. In other words, umami goes ballistic. Think of ham and melted cheese, or bacon and peas.

Right

MSG has a bad name, but the amino acid glutamate is the source of the elusive fifth taste called umami







PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO



PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO



USING UMAMI

Apart from ramping up tastiness of food, a little umami can round up and balance flavours, and give the final dish that satisfying, meaty flavoured 'oomph'.

Eric Neo, the executive chef of Intercontinental Singapore, usually uses the quality of umami as an 'enhancer'. Three of his favourite savoury go-to's are oyster sauce, soy sauce and dried shrimp. "I use them in braised dishes to bring out the best in the dish, as the essence of the different flavours are nicely integrated. [They also complement] ingredients such as seafood and poultry. And dried shrimp can be used in rice dishes, turning plain rice into a lovely pot of flavoured rice," he says.

This harmonising, magnifying quality of umami can be harnessed for the greater good, too. "Umami plays an important role in helping to reduce the levels of salt and fat in products while still retaining a great taste," says Wahbi. This offers many useful applications in the field of wellness and healthcare. For instance, elderly people who tend not to taste food too well will benefit from flavourful, high-umami foods even as you dial down the sodium. Hospital food, too, does not have to be bland if cooks leverage on healthy, umami-rich dishes. Next time your tastebuds are numbed after

a bad case of flu, reach for umami-rich foods—try a very generous tablespoon of Bovril or Marmite dissolved in a mug of hot water. Surprisingly comforting.

Interestingly, umami has also found its way into the bar, taking cocktails beyond just Bloody Mary. Techniques like fat washing have allowed bartenders to weave savoury flavours into their crystal clear spirits; creations such as the bacon martini and the local version of bak kwa martini certainly had adventurous drinkers all excited. While most of us won't be reaching for such meaty-tasting drinks often during happy hour, it does make life more interesting for drinkers and mixologists like Bannie Kang, the assistant head bartender of Anti:dote Bar in Fairmont Singapore.

"Adding umami-rich ingredients into a cocktail allows the bartender to showcase his creativity, backed by a good foundational knowledge of how well the ingredients work together," she says. One way to do it, she says, is simply to pulverise umami-rich ingredients into a powder to be used as a garnish in cocktails, or by making a sous-vide mixture that can be infused into a cocktail. For the Korean mixologist, favourite umami ingredients include shiitake mushrooms, dried seaweed and kombu.

Clockwise from top left The Japanese have long known that kombu adds umami to a dish; Marmite is a umami-rich food; Cooked meat delivers a satisfactory jolt of umami

While developing Anti:dote's new cocktail menu, Kang created a cocktail named Mother's Hand, a bourbon-based drink that comprises a mixture of shiitake and porcini mushrooms with toasted white sesame. This infusion is prepared sous-vide at 63 degrees Celsius for two hours before being placed in an ice bath to cool down. Inspired by the Korean term 'umma-son', which means 'mother's hand', the cocktail draws reference from Asian mothers' home cooking, where ingredients such as onions, mushrooms and sesame are often used.

It seems that our love for all-things umami reaches beyond merely good taste and deep into our most primal make up. Like early man craved sweet foods—which Nature infused with energy-giving sugars and calories crucial for the next hunt and hence, survival—and shunned bitter flavours which signalled toxins, the taste of umami marks proteins...cooked ones to boot. Scientists have considered that this could be one way Nature ensured that the food early man craved and ate were detoxified, allowing one not just to receive

much-needed nutrients, but also to live another day.

But in this day and age, umami spells the enjoyment of food, a more-ish, comforting flavour which, as chef Neo so well articulates it, "is so tasty that the moment you taste it, you find excitement on your tongue". More than the fifth taste, it is perhaps also a state of mind. **WD**

Right

Anti:dote mixologist
Bannie Kang
experiments with
mushrooms and
seaweed in her drinks



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Worth His Salt

Industry veteran Alfred Leung sets his sights on bringing Imperial Treasure's brand of Chinese cuisine to the world

WORDS CHARLENE CHOW

It is a media tasting at the new Imperial Treasure Fine Teochew Cuisine, Ion Orchard. Alfred Leung, founder and CEO of the Imperial Treasure Group, reclines in his seat with a leopard's grace. But his eyes are watchful, as if he is used to anticipating and troubleshooting the unexpected.

One imagines this is the sort of alacrity required of someone who has thrived for more than 40 years in the F&B industry. Born in Hong Kong, Leung cut his teeth at places like Swiss restaurant Islander in Wanchai and Chinese restaurants in Kowloon and Tsim Sha Tsui before moving to Singapore in the early 1980s. After working at restaurants like Happy Valley at Singapore Shopping Centre, he opened Crystal Jade, before leaving to start the first Imperial Treasure Teochew Cuisine in Ngee Ann City in 2004.

Little more than a decade later, Imperial Treasure Group's portfolio of restaurants offering different concepts of Chinese cuisine from fine dining to quick serves, has grown to over 30 restaurants, including five in Shanghai, one in Guangzhou and one in Hong Kong—the latter two opened this January. Opening an Imperial Treasure Fine Chinese restaurant in his hometown of Hong Kong was particularly close to Leung's heart. The location at Tsim Sha Tsui's One Peking Building was chosen for its skyline view of the Victoria Harbour. A second outlet is expected to open on Hong Kong island later this year.

Leung says he never dreamt he was going to head a food empire one day, but he always had a passion for good food. "I am fond of good Chinese food, especially classic Cantonese. But it would be difficult to name a favourite dish. Even something as simple as a bowl of wonton noodle soup is a good dish to me," he says. Ever the professional restaurateur, but ask him what his last meal would be if he had his way, and he says it would be "something simple", like "pigeon paired with a glass of fine red wine".

But Leung prefers to talk about business. To many who have asked him why the strong focus on China despite the tough competition there, he replies that the exponential growth of Chinese

investments globally over the past decade has led to an increase in demand for quality authentic Chinese cuisine. These conditions have made it an ideal platform to enter the China market. After five years in Shanghai, his efforts have been rewarded in more ways than one, but the most prized of all must be the two Michelin stars bestowed on Imperial Treasure Fine Chinese Cuisine in Shanghai last year. Leung wears the accolade with pride and responsibility.

"Winning two Michelin stars is an unbelievable achievement," Leung says. "However, it has not changed what has always been the focus of our business—delighting our customers with great food, service and ambience. They are our biggest critics, and it is for them that we continue to push the boundaries and work hard to deliver the finest Chinese cuisine every day." It may not have changed their business values, but Michelin's recognition has undoubtedly given the brand greater exposure and sets the stage for carrying out Leung's lifelong ambition to share the delicacies of Imperial Treasure around the world, with a focus on fine dining. "As I travel around the world, I see a gap in the market for fine Chinese cuisine. While Chinese cuisine has a huge presence in London, Paris, Tokyo and South Korea, there are few serving authentic, fine Chinese cuisine. This is where Imperial Treasure will be able to stand out because of our fine dining offerings."

Plans are already underway to open in other countries—Seoul this year and Japan the next, as well as European cities including London and Paris in the next few years. Circumspect as ever, Leung says, "The Michelin award gives us the confidence to know we will be successful with our international expansion plans. But there is now much to live up to, and so we must work harder than ever." He adds that the additional investment by Navis Capital Partners, who became a shareholder in 2015, and the help they can provide in strengthening parts of the business will help the Imperial Treasure Group accelerate their expansion to major global cities.

The greatest challenge in this business, he says, is maintaining the quality of food. "It must

Opposite page,
from top Mr Alfred
Leung; Imperial
Treasure Fine
Teochew Cuisine,
Ion Orchard



be consistent during good times and bad times. In good times, people are more willing to spend, and their expectations are higher. When times are not so good, people still dine out, but they are more selective on where they spend their money. Consistent high quality food has helped Imperial Treasure through the difficult times and do well during the good times.”

Perhaps that is why of all the advice he imparts to son Kenny, a trained architect who is learning the ropes of the Group as business development and project manager, the most important one is to never rest on your laurels. “We have to keep improving and scaling new heights. Perseverance is key,” says Leung. To all aspiring F&B entrepreneurs, he advises: “One must keep a relentless attention to detail and focus on hospitality. Standards are everything. You must have passion for the industry as this translates to the food.”

He certainly lives by that mantra as his restaurants slowly but surely widen their foothold on the world stage. **WD**



The & Salt Sweet of It

056




For Chef André Chiang of Restaurant André, salt is an essential ingredient that spotlights and transforms others. Here, he shares six recipes that explore the various depths of saltiness

WORDS **JOYCELINE TULLY** ART DIRECTION **PEARL LIM** STYLING **PRISCILLA TAN** PHOTOGRAPHY **CALVIN TAN**



Butternut with salted duck yolk An elegant interpretation of a classic



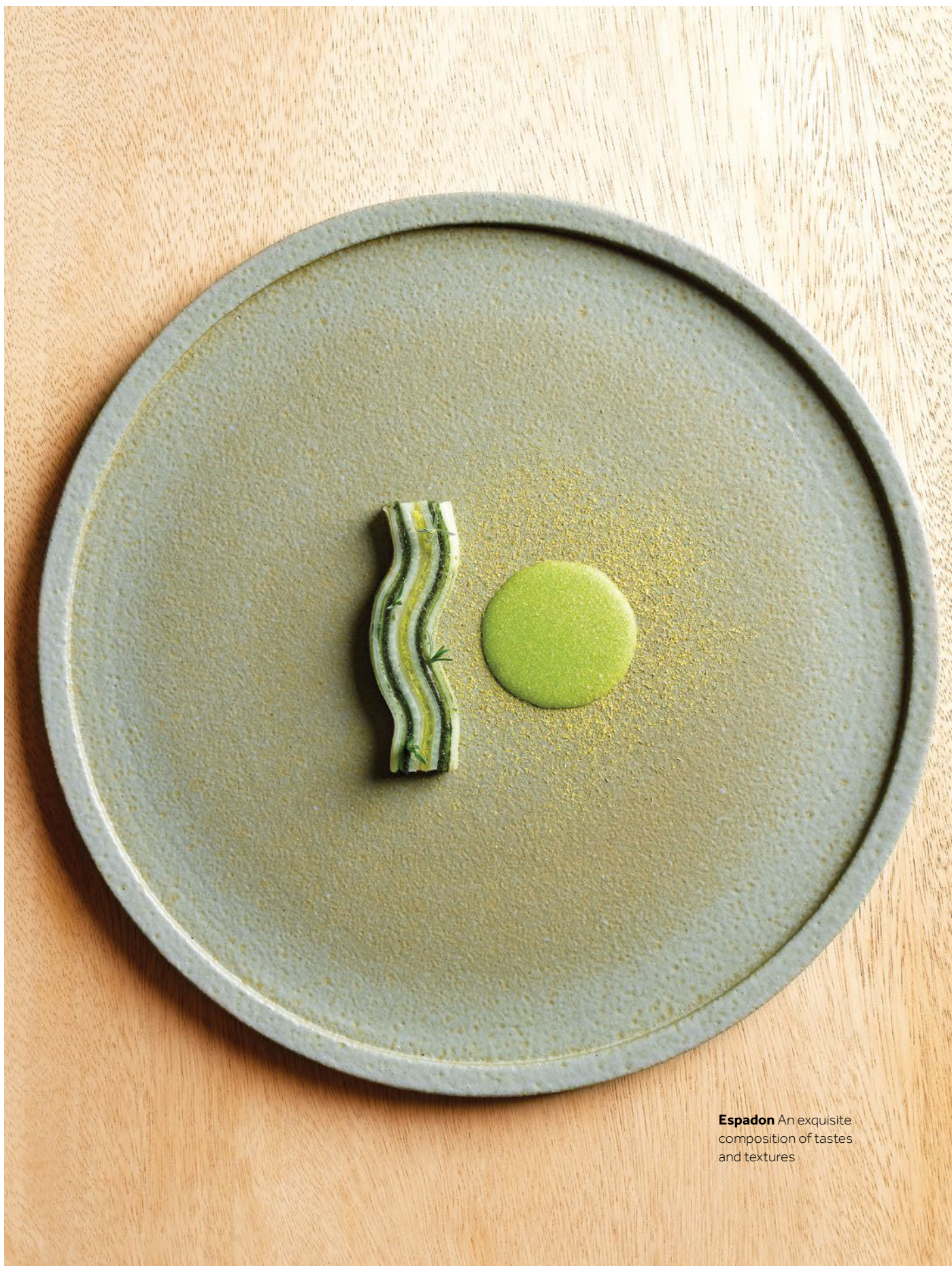
Legumes This dish shows off yet another depth of saltiness—here developed through the fermented vegetable broth



Almond potato salad
Seaweed and lardo add
a fifth dimension to this
humble classic




Squid The lovely
briny taste of the
sea on a plate



061

Espadon An exquisite composition of tastes and textures

A close-up photograph of a single, perfectly round rice ball (onigiri) resting on a white, shallow ceramic plate. The rice ball is made of white, short-grained rice and is coated with a fine layer of white powder, likely salt. The plate is set on a light-colored wooden surface. The background is a wall made of irregular, light-colored stone tiles, creating a textured, rustic look. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the texture of the rice and the stone.

"Rice ball" A pinch of salt adds the final touch to this sweet rice dessert



"Rice Ball"

Serves 4

Chef André says that this is probably his most memorable dessert. Rice may be the key component, but "its sweetness comes from a pinch of salt," he explains. "The beauty is that you don't expect that."

60g Japanese rice

Pinch of sea salt

For the toasted rice milk ice cream:

32g sugar

40g egg yolks

48g cream

107g rice, toasted in a dry pan until golden brown

1.6g ice cream stabiliser, optional

Pinch of sea salt

For the amazake espuma:

80g amazake*

40g milk

8g sugar

Pinch of sea salt

8.5% Pro Espuma, optional**

Special equipment:

Dehydrator

Siphon

Ice cream machine

1. Place the Japanese rice in a pan with roughly twice the amount of water (1:2 proportion) and cook until the rice grains are puffy and overcooked, but still hold their shape, about 1 hr. Strain and rinse with water.
2. Spread the grains evenly on a non-stick silicone baking mat and dehydrate in a dehydrator till dry. Alternatively, leave them overnight in an oven at 55°C. Set aside until ready to use.
3. Prepare the ice cream. Mix the sugar, yolks and cream in a clean pan. Warm the mixture up to 68°C, then let it cool down. Stir in the toasted rice, stabiliser (if using) and salt. Strain and churn in an ice cream machine according to manufacturer's instructions.
4. Prepare the espuma. Combine all the ingredients and blend well in a mixer. Reserve until ready for use.
5. Assemble the dish. Scoop some ice cream and charge the amazake espuma in 3-cream charger in an espuma bottle, if using. Alternatively, spoon some amazake mixture on top. Coat the ice cream with the puffed rice and shape into a rice ball. (You will need to work quickly as the ice cream will melt, especially if you do not use the stabiliser.) Top with a pinch of salt and serve immediately.

** Amazake is a traditional Japanese sweet drink made from fermented rice. It is available at Japanese speciality stores.*

*** Often used in the professional kitchen, this is an emulsifier that helps give the mixture structure when using a siphon.*

Butternut With Salted Duck Yolk Serves 4

The humble salted egg yolk gets a classy upgrade in this rendition. Butternut gives a subtle sweetness, acting as a counterpoint to it.

2 duck yolks
12g sanbai vinegar
1 butternut

For the butternut chip:

40g butternut purée
4g glucose
4g sugar
8g isomalt*

For the butternut mousse:

40g butternut purée
0.8g vanilla seeds
Sugar and salt, to taste
1.5 sheets gelatine, soaked in iced water
20g whipping cream

Special equipment:

Dehydrator

1. Marinate the duck yolks in the vinegar overnight. Set aside.
2. Cut the butternut into small pieces and steam at 100°C until soft, about 30 to 40 mins. Blend the butternut in a mixer until smooth. (Make ahead and keep in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 2 days.)
3. Prepare the butternut chip. Mix all the ingredients and boil, stirring constantly until thickened. Spread the purée evenly on a non-stick silicone mat and dehydrate in a dehydrator at 70°C until crispy. Alternatively, bake in an oven at 70°C for 10 mins. Set aside.
4. Prepare the mousse. Combine the purée, vanilla seeds, sugar and salt in a pot, and bring to a boil. Remove from heat, then add the gelatine into the hot butternut mixture and mix well. Adjust seasoning and set aside to cool.
5. Whip the cream to soft peaks, then gently fold the cream into the butternut mixture. Transfer to a container and set aside.
6. Assemble the dish**. Break the butternut chip into uneven pieces. Place ½ tsp mousse on a piece, crumble over some salted duck yolk, then sandwich with another piece of butternut chip.

** Isomalt is a sugar substitute often used in the professional pastry kitchen.*

*** Chef André uses a stencilling mould to assemble the dish, as pictured, in his kitchen.*

Legumes

Serves 4

The fermented vegetables add incredible 'oomph' to the dish and give an intense depth of flavour. Feel free to substitute the vegetables as desired.

½ butternut, peeled and thinly sliced
200ml white balsamic vinegar
1 chicory
200ml cranberry juice
400ml chicken stock
1.2g Xantana or cornstarch

For the vegetables:

2 baby fennel
4 baby leeks
4 leeks flower
2 purple baby carrots
2 yellow baby carrots
2 orange baby carrots
1.5 baby turnip
Half a black daikon
Half a green daikon
1 baby zucchini
4 sugar peas, shelled and blanched

For the fermented vegetable broth:

All the trimmings from the legumes
120ml chicken stock
200ml water

1. Pour the white balsamic vinegar over the butternut, and set aside to pickle for 5 hrs.
2. Cut the chicory in half and vacuum seal it with the cranberry juice. (Alternatively, place in a Ziplock bag.) Steam in a steam oven at 85°C for 15mins.
3. Bring the chicken stock to boil, then simmer until reduced by half. Blend well with the Xantana. Set aside.
4. Prepare the vegetables. Thinly slice the vegetables except the peas, reserving all the trimmings. Blanch the vegetables separately and set aside.
5. Prepare the broth. Lay out the vegetable trimmings on a tray and leave in the oven at 55°C for 72hrs to ferment. Alternatively, use 30g storebought white kimchi.
6. Combine the fermented vegetables (or white kimchi), water and chicken stock,

and bring to a boil. Strain and set aside.

(Make ahead and store in an airtight container in the fridge for 3 days or freeze. Use this as you would a vegetable stock.)

7. Assemble the dish. Toss all the vegetables in the reduced chicken stock. Arrange them on the serving dish, then spoon over the fermented vegetable broth.

Almond Potato Salad

Serves 4

This is a delicious salty twist to the conventional potato salad with the addition of lardo, or Italian cured pork fat. The tubers are also coated with seaweed powder.

8 potato fingerlings, scrubbed*
133g milk
5g salt
27g dried wakame
8 thin slices of lardo
80g sugar peas, shelled and blanched for 10 secs
Ice plant, to garnish (optional)

For the onion jus:

270g onion
270ml water

For the aioli:

1.5 cloves garlic
133g sunflower oil
Pinch of spigol spice mix**
Salt, to taste

1. Prepare the onion jus. Slice the onion and combine with water, then vacuum seal the mixture. (Alternatively, place in a Ziplock bag.) Steam in a steam oven for 1 hr, then strain and reduce by half. (You can make ahead and store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 1 week.)
2. Prepare the aioli. Boil the garlic in water until soft. Blend in the sunflower oil with the cooked garlic, a little at a time to emulsify like mayonnaise. Add the spice mix and season with salt.
3. Place the potatoes in the milk and add salt. Simmer until cooked, about 30 mins. Set aside.
4. Blend the dried wakame in a mixer at high speed until very fine.
5. Assemble the dish. Pipe the aioli in the centre of the serving dish. Cover with 2 slices of lardo and lightly torch them.

Dust the potato fingerlings with wakame powder and arrange on the dish. Scatter the sugar peas and garnish with the ice plant if using.

** Chef André uses almond potatoes sourced from Norway for their intense flavour. Alternatively, use Noirmoutier or Ratte potatoes.*

*** Spigol spice mix is a blend of saffron and various spices. It is available at speciality gourmet stores.*

Squid

Serves 4

The saltiness from this dish comes from the sea, says chef André. Indeed, the deft use of fresh squid and wakame and konbu in the stock bring to life the briny flavours of the sea.

1 squid, about 700g, cleaned and membrane removed
100g butter
100g water

For the kelp water:

20g wakame
20g konbu
1L water

For the kelp jus:

133g baby spinach, blanched till soft
53g chicken stock
107g kelp water
0.6g Xantana* or cornstarch

For the potato purée:

100g Russet potatoes, peeled
100g unsalted butter, cubed
10g milk, or as required
Salt, to taste

1. Prepare the kelp water. Boil the wakame and konbu in the water and simmer for 2 hrs. This can be made ahead and stored in the fridge for up to 3 days. Alternatively, freeze it. (This can be used to make a quick stock.)
2. Prepare the kelp jus. Combine all the ingredients and blend well in a mixer. Set aside until ready to use.
3. Prepare the potato purée. Cook the potato in salted boiling water until very soft. Strain the water, then pass the potatoes through a fine sieve. Add the butter to the mashed potato, stirring to mix well. Add in the milk if the purée is too

thick; it should have the consistency of mayonnaise. Season with salt and keep warm until ready to use.

4. Slice the squid very thinly like fettucine, about 0.5cm wide, and set aside. Combine the butter and water, and bring to a simmer. Blanch the squid in the beurré blanc just before serving.
5. Assemble the dish. Place some potato purée on the serving dish and top with the blanched squid. Spoon over kelp jus and serve immediately.

** Xantana is a brand name of xanthan gum. It comes in a powdered form, and works as a thickener. Use cornstarch if unavailable.*

Espadon

Serves 4

Homemade pickles laced with salt heighten the flavours in this exquisitely composed dish.

1 pc swordfish belly, about 600g
40g hay
Salt and Szechuan pepper, to taste
1 cucumber, finely sliced and blanched
20g dried chrysanthemum
Sea rosemary, to garnish (optional)

For the wakame jelly:

40g dried wakame
8g dashi water
80ml water
1.2g agar agar

For the chrysanthemum jelly:

12g honey
80ml water
1.2g agar agar
40g dried chrysanthemum

For the daikon:

1 green daikon, thinly sliced
1 daikon, thinly sliced
100g salt
250ml water
60g sugar

For the pickling liquid:

60g lime juice
20ml water
20g sugar
10g salt

For the jalapeno emulsion:

80g jalapeno, seeds removed
1.5 cucumber, peeled and seeds removed
8g dashi water
20g lime juice
4g Xantana or cornstarch
200ml water
Salt and sugar, to taste

1. Prepare the wakame jelly. Blend the dried wakame into powder. Boil the water and dashi, then add in the agar agar. Stir till dissolved, then add in the wakame powder. Transfer to a mould (25cm x 15cm) to set. (Make ahead and keep in the fridge for up to 2 days.)
2. Prepare the chrysanthemum jelly. Combine the honey, water and agar agar in a pan, and bring to boil. Add in the chrysanthemum and mix well. Transfer to a mould (25cmx15cm) to set. (Make ahead and keep in the fridge for up to 2 days.)
3. Prepare the daikon. Combine the salt, water and sugar. Blanch the daikon and place in the salted water for 1 hr.
4. Prepare the pickling liquid. Combine the lime juice, water, sugar and salt. Transfer the daikon and pickle in the lime juice mixture for 30 mins.
5. Slice the fish thinly and cold smoke with hay for 30 mins*. Alternatively use storebought smoked swordfish or any type of smoked fish that comes sliced. Season with salt and Szechuan pepper.
6. Layer the various components as you would a lasagne in the following order: daikon, cucumber, chrysanthemum jelly, swordfish, wakame jelly, cucumber and daikon.
7. Blend the dried chrysanthemum in an electric mixer until very fine. Pass through a fine sieve.
8. Prepare the jalapeno emulsion. Blend all the ingredients in an electric mixer until smooth. Season with salt and sugar.
9. Assemble the dish. Carefully slice the swordfish 'lasagne' and place a piece on a plate. Pipe or spoon some emulsion beside it and sprinkle with chrysanthemum powder. **WD**

** To cold smoke the fish, pack some ice in a Ziplock bag and place the fish on top before smoking.*

Savoury Associations

Pairing wine with salty, umami and savoury flavours

WORDS **PATRICIA GUY**

Salt shaped the religious, economic, cultural and pharmacological development of civilization. Cities grew up around salt deposits, wars were fought to maintain control of the precious product, and it was at one time or another used as currency in every part of the globe. It has been prized as a preservative—from fresh fish to Egyptian mummies—and its derivatives are a component in a vast array of products from plastic to pottery glazes. Above all, throughout the centuries, salt has been most consistently admired for its almost miraculous ability to brighten and enhance the fragrance and flavours of the food we eat.

What we refer to as flavour is a really a fusion of smell and taste. The molecules in salt react with those in food, allowing for the release of those evocative scents that excite our memory as well as our taste buds. It is this profound impact on fragrance (as well as taste) that makes salt so necessary in cooking. In short, many things just taste better with a pinch of salt.

SALTY PRESENCE

There are essentially three ways in which natural saltiness is perceived in food. The most straightforward arises from the brininess of uncooked

Saltiness in food will make a slightly sweet wine appear to taste even sweeter, while the wine's sweetness noticeably reduces the perception of saltiness in the food

seafood. Remember that salt originated from the evaporation of seawater, or as the Greek philosopher Pythagoras put it more poetically: "Salt is born of the purest parents: the sun and the sea."

Dishes based on raw oysters or delicately flavoured fish call out for tangy, unoaked (or very lightly oaked) whites, with zesty acidity and subtle aromas. In this case, the wine acts in the same way as a squeeze of lemon juice, making the food seem brighter and more appealing, while its delicate

fragrance does not overwhelm those of the ingredients in the dish. The classic pairing in this category is Muscadet and raw oysters. This wine's light salinity also serves to mirror the oysters' scent of the open sea.

Other white wines with a similar profile include dry Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, French Sancerre, Chablis, Pouilly-Fumé and Entre-Deux-Mers, Albariño from Spain, a zingy Custoza, Gavi or Verdicchio from Italy, Austrian Grüner Veltliner

and Portuguese Vinho Verde. These zippy, palate-cleansing wines are also perfect accompaniments for deep-fried or pan-fried fish and vegetables, as they cut through the oily sensation that is a result of the cooking technique.

SWEET PAIRINGS

Foods with both an umami and a salty element—such as blue cheese, cured meat and fermented or dried foods—will often make the alcohol in wine seem stronger, and can bring out metallic or bitter tastes. Bitterness in food seems to increase the bitterness in the wine. For that reason, it is best to choose a medium-sweet to fully sweet wine. The silky textures and concentrated fragrances of these wines fit comfortably alongside umami/salty foods and help provide a balanced taste sensation. But do note that saltiness in food will make a slightly sweet wine appear to taste even sweeter, while the wine's sweetness noticeably reduces the perception of saltiness in the food.

There are two classic pairings here: Sauternes and Roquefort, and Port and Stilton. The richness and acidity of the wines combine with the salty tang of the cheeses to create a creamy, sweet-and-sour sensation on the palate.

Other wines that fit this category include Moscato d'Asti, or any of the plethora of sweet Moscatos, Moscatels and Muscats from around the world, sweeter style or 'dry' Prosecco, Chenin

Blanc, demi-sec Vouvray, and many non-dry German whites. On the high side of sweet, you will find wines labelled Sélection de Grains Nobles, Trockenbeerenauslese, Vendange Tardive, late-harvest, Eiswein and passito.

Sweet wines are also a nifty foil for spicy dishes, as their sweetness tempers the fiery heat of chillies. They also underscore the sweet notes found in many Asian dishes from the likes of coconut milk, sugar or dried fruit.

GETTING SAUCED

Another umami/salt flavour combination is to be found in soy, fish and oyster sauces. These were developed as a way to make the precious cache of salt go further. Indeed, the word 'sauce' is derived from the past participle of the Early Latin word 'sallere', which means 'to salt'. Again, with dishes that are dependent on such sauces, it is best to choose a sprightly medium-sweet wine.

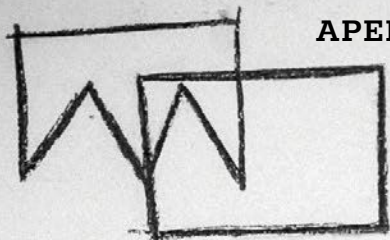
If you want to go for a red, remember that the saltiness of soy and oyster sauces will be accentuated by the tannin and alcohol of red wines. Hence, that restaurant mainstay Cabernet Sauvignon may not be an ideal choice. Instead look to wines with softer tannins, such as those made from the grape varieties Pinot Noir, Gamay (Beaujolais), Dolcetto, Lambrusco or Cabernet Franc from cool climate areas. These wines offer rich, broadly fruity flavours and a softness on the palate that will not clash with the salty sauce.

Fresh, well-structured rosés also work well. Their attractive fragrances and much lower tannin levels subdue the salty flavours found in soy sauce, oyster sauce, shrimp paste and bean paste. Try a lychee-hued Bardolino Chiaretto to add a touch of elegance to your meal.

Perhaps the most celebrated of classic pairings is Champagne and caviar. On its own, caviar has a mildly fishy flavour, a crisp, briny fragrance and a satisfying sensation on the palate that comes from biting into the gelatinous spheres. The wine's bubbles match this texture, while its sprightly acidity helps make the roe's oiliness more creamy.

In fact, Champagne goes down a treat with practically all salty food, from potato chips to Gorgonzola tartlets, and all points in between. So when in doubt about what to serve, break out the bubbly. Great dry and off-dry sparkling wines are produced all over the world. Why not try a Trentodoc or Franciacorta from Italy, or a Spanish Cava for a change?

As always when speaking of food and wine pairing, we must remember that every palate is different, just as every fingerprint is unique. So, use these wine pairing suggestions not as rules but... with a pinch of salt! **WD**



APERITIFS

COCKTAILS & MORE

Mark your calendars and get your livers ready as the highly anticipated **Singapore Cocktail Festival** returns from 16 to 21 March.

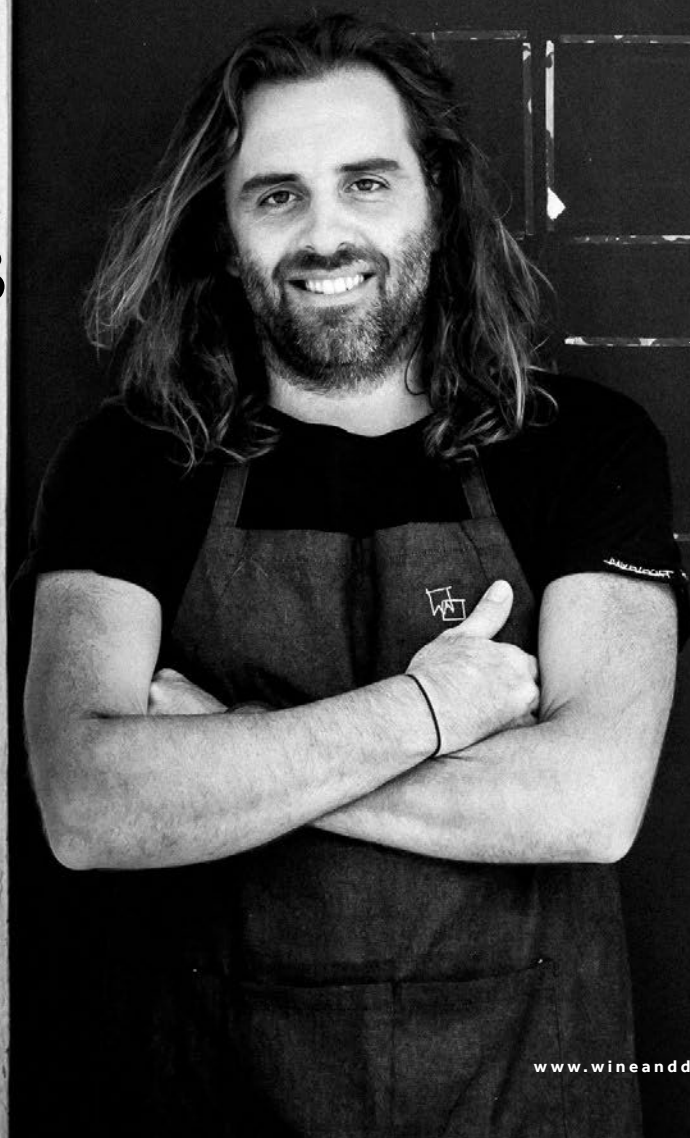
This year's line-up sees over 40 participating bars across the city offering special cocktail menus, thematic cocktail parties, bar tours, guest bartending stints from award-winning international bartenders and master classes. Apart from drinking your way across town, revellers can also make their way to the 5,000-sqm festival village located on 99 Beach Road, where they can expect live music, a food street showcasing grub from local restaurants, 10 fully immersive cocktail and mocktail rooms where over 50 cocktails can be sampled at \$12 nett each, and a tasting room of handcrafted and small-batch spirits. Entry to the village is free.

singaporecocktailfestival.com

operation hours
tues-sat
6pm-late



068





A WORLD OF GIN

Located in the lobby of Parkview Square, the new **Atlas Bar** is a welcoming all-day drinking and dining establishment in grand Art Deco style. Taking centerstage is the 15-metre **Gin Tower**, which houses over 800 bottles of gins curated by gin master **Jason Williams**, ranging from **London dry gins** that date back to 1910, to modern craft gins from across the globe. There's also a 250-label champagne collection and Art Deco-inspired cocktails by head bartender **Roman Foltán**, previously from London's award-winning **Artesian** at **The Langham**, a winner of the World's Best Bar for four consecutive years.

Parkview Square, 600 North Bridge Road. Tel: 6396 4466; atlasbar.sg

WORDS **JOYCE HUANG**

Morning cocktails

Whether it be morning fuel, a power lunch or a leisurely coffee catch-up, **Crackerjack** offers up a fun and approachable venue where one can get craft coffees, fresh cocktails and feel-good food. The all-day establishment at Tanjong Pagar welcomes all with a modern open dining room featuring large communal tables, free Wi-Fi and charging stations, trendy art and a shuffleboard.

On the coffee front, Crackerjack has collaborated with 2Degrees North, an independent local roaster, to develop a custom espresso blend. If it's a cocktail you're after, Crackerjack's drinks menu features everything from flavour-forward and unfussy highballs combining natural, housemade syrups with soda and craft spirits to stirred drinks made with artisanal spirits, and even fun libations like the Fro-zay (\$19), an upgraded rendering of frozen rose wine from Provence.

43 Tanjong Pagar Road. Tel: 8121 1462; crackerjack.sg



TASTING NOTES



Dufour par Charles, Les Instantanes La Pulpe et le Grain

Charles Dufour represents a new generation of vigneron in Champagne that challenges the status quo. He started working in the family business in 2006 and set about converting his estate's vineyards to biodynamic, something particularly difficult in the Champagne region due to the wet and cold conditions. He is one of the few producers who grow Pinot Blanc in Champagne, and he uses only natural yeasts in his wines. This wine uses the 2009 vintage as base and comprises 45 per cent Pinot Blanc, 35 per cent Pinot Noir and 20 per cent Chardonnay. Delicate, with a creamy mousse, the bubbly takes on layers of juicy flavours thanks to the aging on lees for at least 18 months.

\$85 from winejourney.com.sg



Pewsey Vale, The Contours, Eden Valley Riesling 2011

Tasted at a recent Wine Australia masterclass, this single vineyard wine from old vines is the epitome of vitality and complexity. The Contours Riesling carries a myriad of enticing citrus and white flower aromas, with layers of toasty lemongrass notes brought about by five years of bottle-aging. Its generous and flavourful palate of lime, brioche and lemongrass is matched by a racing natural acidity. This wine is good to age for many years to come, accumulating richness and complexity along the way.

\$61, from Monopole



Southeast Asian Tipples

Following their move to Amoy Street last year, **Ding Dong** has rolled out a new cocktail menu to complement their contemporary Southeast Asian-inspired dishes. Group bar manager Joe Schofield incorporates local flavours into tipples like Hawker (\$20), a gin-based cocktail with hawberry, Japanese cucumber, Amaro Montenegro, lemon and egg white, and served with a side of haw flakes; the refreshing Ding Dong Daiquiri (\$18), a rum-based drink with cherry eau de vie, raspberry, lychee and lime; and Trade Wind (\$20), another gin-based concoction featuring roasted barley, citrus, cream, egg white, soda and gomme, and playfully presented with fizz, froth and crunchy meringue topping.

01-02, 115 Amoy Street. Tel: 6557 0189; dingdong.com.sg



WHISKEY WALL

Step into **The Wall** housed in a two-storey conservation shophouse along Tanjong Pagar Road and be struck by the beautiful exposed brick walls that date back to its original construction 100 years ago. Here, whisky appreciation is taken to another level, not just an after-dinner enjoyment, but specifically paired with sumiyaki.

Pick a la carte from a comprehensive sukiyaki menu, go for whisky and sumiyaki pairing sets, or leave it in the hands of the chef with an omakase menu with whisky pairings. The Wall also serves up 20 top-quality whiskies by the glass and whisky flights. Novices will love the helpful whisky tasting chart indicating the characteristics of whiskies—from delicate to smoky, light to rich—to aid in selecting their drink, while connoisseurs will appreciate rare gems such as the Yamazaki 50 years, the (Crystal) Black Bowmore 29 years First Edition and The Macallan 1948 Select Reserve 51 years.

76 Tanjong Pagar Road. Tel: 6225 7988; thewallsg.com

Bar-Proof Your Home

Cocktail aficionados and spirits fans who'd like to spiffy up their home bar need now only look to **EC Proof** to get their swag. Comprising a website and The Proof Flat, a flagship retail and education salon, EC Proof is the new retail arm of spirits distributor Proof & Company Spirits. From the e-commerce site, one can place orders for spirits, bar tools, glassware, bitters and even cocktail books. For those who prefer to sample before purchase, head to The Proof Flat where an expert team of Personal Spirits Advisors are on hand to answer questions and provide samples.

43A HongKong Street. Tel: 8228 0113; ecproof.com



Winemaker

Caroline Morey

Caroline Morey, daughter of famed Chassagne-Montrachet producer Jean-Marc Morey, has been involved in winemaking for over 20 years. Together with her husband Pierre-Yves Colin, she produces some of the most in-demand quality white Burgundy under the label Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey (PYCM). In 2013, Morey inherited some vineyard parcels from her father, and 2014 marks her first vintage as a winemaker under her own label, Caroline Morey. Comprising a focused range of Chassagne-Montrachet—both red and white—the wines are all vinified and élevaged in the same cellars as PYCM.

***Wine & Dine* caught up with her when she was in town recently, over a dinner held at Imperial Treasure Fine Teochew Dining that paired the food with a selection of her 2014 and 2015 releases.**

I wouldn't say I have a particular style of wine, I just try to make the wine as the grapes are. It's impossible to make good wine without good grapes, so from the beginning, we try to manage the vineyard to the

best of our abilities. For white wines, it's just about pressing good grapes and putting them into barrels. I want to show the terroir and make pure wines that I like to drink—mineral and not too heavy on the wood. I only use 40 per cent new oak barrels (and big barrels at that). I prefer a longer élevage, and I don't do racking or fining, unless necessary.

In 2013, my father gifted my brother and me parts of his estate. I've got more Premier Cru parcels in Chassagne, and he has more parcels in Santenay, but we share big parcels like Champs Gains and Caillerets. I began with 2.5 hectares, but this year I'll be increasing the total estate size of my vineyards to seven hectares as I'll be getting a few more parcels from my father and renting more hectares from otherwise neglected vineyards. This will include a small bit of the Grand Cru Criots-Bâtard-Montrachet.

I've learnt much from my father and husband.

Pierre makes the purest white wines, respecting the terroir and forgoing the unnecessary addition of yeast and other additives. I like my father's style of red wines and his preference for keeping them fruit-forward, though I differ in winemaking methods by putting whole bunches of grapes into my wines, whereas he doesn't.

Then again, I don't use 100 per cent whole bunches of grapes as I don't think it's a good idea to do that for Pinot Noir. But I try to put some whole bunches into my wines to give them more structure and fruit. In 2014, I put around 30 to 40 per cent whole bunches into two of my cuvées. In 2015, the grapes were all very nice and pure, so I put about 30 to 50 per cent whole bunches into all my cuvées. In 2016, we had frost which hindered the maturity of the grapes, so I didn't use any whole bunches at all. I've only done three vintages so far, so each time is like a test.

The ageing potential for my wines range from about five to 10 years for the village, and up to 30 years for the Premier Crus like Chaumes and Caillerets. Nowadays many people are drinking wines very early. But I don't think it's good to open a Premier Cru Burgundy too soon as the wine needs time in the bottle. I want to make wines that can age. As they age, they'll take on new flavours and it's interesting to see what they can become. **WD**



As Nature Intended

With sustainability becoming increasingly important, natural wines are coming to the fore, and some are very good indeed

WORDS **EDWIN SOON**

Unlike organic wines made without any addition of chemicals and using only organic material, or biodynamic wines where grapes are farmed sustainably with 'inputs of production' found on the farm, natural wines are made as 'nature intended'. In other words, the human touch is kept to the minimum in the cultivation and creation of natural wines.

Grapes of natural wines may be grown on organic, biodynamic or sustainable vineyards. However, the goal is to produce wine that is untainted by human intervention so that the taste of terroir in the wines shines brightest. Stuart Olsen from Mudjee and Orange in New South Wales, Australia, is a former school teacher who now makes natural wine. "I believe in employing traditional, hands-off methods to achieve this more natural, softer, riper, fruit-driven style of wine," he says.

"Lessons from the old, even ancient, ways of doing things mean I don't try to bend nature; I let her do her thing. I rely on my instincts, what I see, hear and feel, and I don't employ any more technology or machinery than is necessary. I treat the fruit differently every year according to the conditions given me, but my method is gentle and soft—like my wines."

HANDS-OFF WINEMAKING

Indeed, speak with any natural wine producer and they eschew using commercial yeast strains, instead allowing yeasts in the environment to spontaneously ferment the grape juice. They use cement or clay amphorae for fermentation and storage, as new oak barrels tend to 'over-spice' and mask the wine's taste. And if any substance is added at all, it will be a smidgen of sulphur to render the wine safe for transport. Certainly, wine manufacturing 'correctives' that change tannin structures, acidity levels and alcohol levels are never used as





A hit list of natural wines from Australia...

Bobar Yarra, Victoria

Described as the 'Fonz' of Yarra, Tom Belford and wife use whole bunches in an open fermenter—no crushing or de-stemming, no pigeage and pumping over, and no yeast

NDV, McLaren Vale

Bright, jubilant Nero d'Avola from Brad Hickey, who has baked bread, brewed beer and worked with Daniel Boulud

Blind Corner, Margaret River

The western state's very own from the Quindalup vineyard

Boomtown Red, Central Victoria

Small batch 'honest' wines from a winemaking cooperative that is intent on creating community spirit

CLO, Mornington Peninsula

Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, Semillon, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and more from a small producer

Didi, Adelaide Hills

Nebbiolos and unusual blends from Down Under

Domaine Simha, Tasmania

Husband-and-wife team Nav Singh and Louise Radman craft Burgundy-inspired wines using natural wine techniques

and the world

Clos Canarelli, Corsica, France

Champion of native Corsican varieties. Wines are fermented in egg-shaped cement tanks that function as modern-day amphorae

COS, Sicily, Italy

Founded by three friends who wanted to create wines in the same way as their ancestors. Their Cerasuolo di Vittoria is one of Sicily's best

Frank Cornelissen Etna, Sicily, Italy

Ultra-low yields, later harvests and wines aged in amphorae buried in volcanic rock define these wines

Foradori, Trentino Alto Adige, Italy

The winery is found in the mountain ranges of the Dolomites and specialises in the Teroldego grape

Adega José de Sousa, Alentejo, Portugal

A marriage of tradition and modernity from a winery that boasts both stainless steel tanks and more than a hundred clay amphorae.

Barranco Oscuro, Granada, Spain

Grapes are planted on single plots in the Sierra de la Contaviesa mountains, making them some of the highest altitude vines

Dobra Vinice, Moravia, Czech Republic

Pioneers of natural wine in their region, using mostly grapes from vineyards in the Podýjí National Park that are growing on Palaeozoic bedrock

Kabola, Istria, Croatia

From Malvasia and Muscat to sparkling wine and international red varieties, with both amphorae and oak barrel-aged wines

Ligas, Pella, Greece

Located in northern Greece, this producer offers white wine (Roditis, Assyrtiko, Kydonitsa varieties), and red wine (Xinomavro, Limniona varieties) aged in oak

Werlitsc, South Styria, Austria

Specialises in cuvées of Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay and other unique blends

Weingut Rudolf Trossen, Mosel, Germany

Pioneer in the region, with wines that are unfiltered, with no sulphur added

Swick Wines, Washington State and Oregon, USA

Joe Swick eschews sulphur at bottling. In his words: "I like the real deal. No maquillage [makeup]."

Mythopia, Valais, Switzerland

Wines from an experimental biodiversity farm rich with flowers, fruit trees, birds and bees

they are thought to stress and 'alienate' the wine. This approach ensures that the drinker finds in the bottle a wine in its purest form—as nature intended.

The natural wine movement, which began in France, is gaining traction around the world amongst drinkers and producers. As with organic wines a scant decade ago, the quality ranges. One has to sift out the good and best versions, and they are often those made by producers who understand what makes a good wine. Not every natural wine made in the backyard of a farm is going to be delicious and tasting of the terroir. But just like excellent homemade yoghurt, the best natural wine could well come from an artisan producer.

The movement has even led to self-regulation, although producers haven't yet decided who should take on the role of governing body. Just recently, in New York City, the RAW wine fair—which celebrates natural, organic and biodynamic fine wines—saw its organiser Isabelle Legeron, MW, reiterating its Charter of Quality that celebrates 'living' wines. To qualify as a RAW wine, all grapes have to be farmed organically or bio-dynamically and be harvested by hand. No yeasts may be added in primary fermentations, no blocking of malolactic fermentation, no additives should be added, no processing (cryo extraction, reverse osmosis, spinning cone, etc) and no sterile filtration. Any sulphur added must be less than 70mg per litre. Additionally, if the wine is suitable for vegans, it will be indicated. Of course RAW is just one of various societies scattered amongst the many wine producing countries, each with its own code.





From top left

Isabelle Legeron, MW, organiser of RAW wine fair at RAW Wine London; The impressive Arnot-Roberts Sonoma Coast Syrah and Tommy Ruff 'Romanee Tuff' Syrah, both available at Artisan Cellars

Opposite page

Winemaker James Erskine of Jauma



PHOTO: CALVIN TAN

AUSTRALIA STANDS OUT

I recently tasted a flight of natural wines from around the world and was taken by the immaculate taste in all of them. I began with two Beaujolais—one from Jean Claude Lapalu and another from Marcel Lapierre—both were resplendent with their succulent fruit. Then I tasted Herve Souhaut's fragrant and pretty Rhone wine that is changing status from biodynamic-organic to natural, followed by Despagne Rapin's Vinum Simplex, a Cabernet Franc from the Loire that's raised in a clay amphorae. Vinum Simplex proved smooth, juicy and delicate. Next, I reached for Arnot-Roberts Sonoma Coast Syrah and revelled in its blue and red fruit overtones with a saline aftertaste.

But it was a pair of Australian wines that impressed me most. Tasting blind, these two amazing Syrahs were the furthest in style from any Syrah/Shiraz wines from Down Under. The first was Jauma 'The Message' Syrah from McLaren Vale in South Australia, but how unlike mainstream Shiraz it was! The wine had a purity to it, the fruit was delicate and perfumed, the tannins were smooth and silky—and it just drank so easily. The second wine was Tommy Ruff 'Romanee Tuff' Syrah from Barossa. It had immense depth and a bouquet of

summer berries, and it was eminently quaffable. In short, they were nothing like the deep, dark, big-fruited alcoholic Barossa Shiraz, or the berry-spice-chocolate-cocoa-liquorice-styled McLaren Vale Shiraz. That's not to say I will turn my nose up at the classic South Australian Shiraz. They are good wines too. But for a wine lover, it's always a real pleasure to uncover new wines, especially when they are au naturel, as these are.

Indeed, they may well be a sign of things to come from Australia. After all, Australia has an advantage, thanks to favourable climatic conditions. Indeed, grape growing is easy with its Mediterranean and almost desert-dry, hot conditions, and often without the plague of frost, nor rot from dampness that could lead to spoilage. Good quality grapes can be cultivated without the use of pesticides and chemicals, which make these grapes excellent raw material for natural wine production.

Not just from Australia, natural wines are coming to the fore around the world. Many feature uplifting balance, moderate alcohol and unmasked terroir articulation with silky textures and stirring energy. Artisanal and made by hand without—or at most with minimal—chemicals or pesticides, who would say no to them? Not us. **WD**

For a taste of wine as nature intended, check out Wine RVL T wine bar, which serves only natural, organic and biodynamic wine
111 Killiney Road.
Tel: 9388 1436

Coming Up Roses, Oman

You'll be smelling of roses if you head to Oman between end March and mid-May. That's when the spectacular rose harvest takes place, when the Jabal Akhdar mountains turns a shade of pink, being covered in thousands of Damask roses. Amid all this beauty is 86-room luxury resort **Alila Jabal Akhdar**, which has rolled out a two-night Rose Experience package (US\$1,109 per couple) where you enjoy a guided tour through the Jabal Akhdar rose terraces, a rose petal bath with sparkling rose wine, and a special Spa Alila rose treatment using naturally infused rose petal oil. Including daily dinner and breakfast as well, this package offers good value and a truly unusual travel experience.

alilahotels.com/jabalakhdar

Funky Dim Sum, Hong Kong

Newly opened **Dim Sum**

Library at Pacific Place is Aqua Group's latest venture, offering a classy, contemporary spin to traditional dim sum fare in lush 1920s-inspired Art Deco surroundings.

Its team of young chefs turn out daringly creative dim sum like black truffle har gau, dan dan xiaolongbao, cheung fan with squid mousse and crispy tofu and king crab, and sea urchin spring roll. Main courses include dishes like foie gras and wagyu beef stone pot fried rice, and Yunnan black truffle chicken. A cocktail bar fronts the restaurant serving up classic and Chinese tea cocktails, while the discreetly located Mahjong Parlour provides a sassy place for a game over afternoon tea.

124/Level 1 Pacific Place, Admiralty, Hong Kong. Tel: +852 3643 0088; dimsumlibrary.com.hk



077



A Taste of Kristang, Malacca

Housed in an iconic historic mansion that forms The Majestic Malacca hotel, newly opened **Melba at the Mansion** is a rare opportunity to taste Kristang cuisine. It is the traditional food of the Malacca-Portuguese community, and descendants of the early Portuguese and Dutch settlers in Malacca. Sambals and fragrant coconut curries typify this precious heritage cuisine, which blends Portuguese-Dutch, British and Peranakan cooking.

Helmed by Kristang celebrity chef Melba Nunis, Melba at the Mansion offers authentic Kristang fare based on the chef's age-old family recipes, from ayam kari keluak and baked stuffed crab to Malacca laksa and sugree cake. Its nostalgic decor—with wooden flooring, Straits Settlement windows overlooking the Malacca River and Chef Melba's personal artifacts—promises to bring you back to the long-vanished, romantic past of Malacca's glory days.

188 Jalan Bunga Raya, 75100 Melaka, Malaysia. Tel: +60 6 289 8000; majesticmalacca.com



Culinary Expedition, China

Serious foodies, splurge on a once-in-a-lifetime luxury journey with The Peninsula Hotels' culinary **Journey Through China**. Created together with Imperial Tours, this exclusive programme pampers guests with travel on private jet, helicopter, luxury yacht and limousine, bringing them to Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou.

Guests stay at the Peninsula Hotels and enjoy gastronomic experiences rarely accessed by others. In this 10-day itinerary, have dinner at a converted Buddhist temple, partake in a classic tea ceremony in a hutong in Beijing, watch how Peking duck is prepared, and take a noodle making class. Then head on to Shanghai where you'll explore the wet market in the French Concession area, and take a day trip to Hangzhou to see the famous Longjing tea plantations. A private jet takes you on to Hong Kong, where you'll enjoy champagne and canapés while cruising Victoria harbour on a traditional junk, visit one of the largest seafood markets in Asia and take a dim-sum making class with the executive chef of The Peninsula Hong Kong. The grand finale of this epic journey is a private helicopter ride over the city.

imperialtours.net

078 Tooting's Best Kept Secret, London

Broadway Market in London's Tooting district has become quite a foodie destination lately. Joining the fray is newly opened bar **The Hill Station**, set to become one of the area's best-kept secrets.

Seating only 12, this new dive is inspired by treks to the Himalayas, with a decor of mountain climbing memorabilia to match. On the menu are Himalaya-inspired drinks such as The Yak's Milk containing Yunnan tea, whiskey, tamarind paste, sugar syrup and egg white, served in copper travelling mugs; while the Hill Station Tea comprises homemade pimiento rum and brandy served in travelling flasks. For nibbles, call the mountain chef on the bakelite phone and ask for a Basecamp Burger, pink sliced flat iron steak served in a toasted brioche bun with watercress and radish salad and beef dripping fries; and the mountain cheese platter served with saffron and pear chutney.

14 Broadway Market, 29 Tooting High Street, London. Tel: +44 20 8672 9410; thehillstationtooting.com





Locavore Luxury, Siem Reap

After a day exploring Angkor Wat, escape the heat of Siem Reap and retire to the lush luxury resort **Phum Baitang** that's just 15 minutes from the airport. Stay in one of its 45 traditionally designed villas amid rice paddies and lemongrass fields, relax at its Temple Spa and take a lesson in Khmer cooking while you send the kids for an afternoon of fun-filled cultural games to learn a thing or two.

Two locally inspired restaurants—Bay Phsar, which means 'rice market', and Hang Bay or 'rice shop'—serve up farm-to-table fare using vegetables and herbs grown in the resort's gardens, while the rice comes directly from nearby paddies. Bay Phsar's Cambodian street market setting lets guests pick their own fresh produce, herbs and spices from the garden for the chef to prepare with their meal. After that, drop in at the Cigar and Cocktail Lounge, housed in a century-old farmhouse, and unwind in a nostalgic plantation setting over cocktails, wines and premium cigars on the terrace.

phumbaitang.com



079

Dining On The Love Boat

Best known for its starring role in the popular 1970s television series *The Love Boat*, Princess Cruises has been synonymous with romance on the high seas. But what of their appeal to a gastronome?

WORDS FOO JIA-EN

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Lazing on comfy deck chairs all day and waited upon hand and foot with an new city to explore each day? It certainly sounds like a dream. But that's what 1.7 million people sign up for every year when they book vacations on Princess Cruises' luxury cruise liners.

Joining their ranks for a few days as the 116,000 tonne Diamond Princess sails back to Singapore—its home port for the season—I felt that one of this cruise ship's many attractions is its isolation from the hustle and bustle of the world.

Besides that, the dining options did not disappoint. Left at the mercy of its galleys and chefs, it was hard not to wonder what would happen if we were stranded on the high seas for an extended period. I need not have worried. Executive chef Nilo Palma, who has been in the business for over 22 years, assured me there was food enough to feed the shipload for a whole week. Even a blackout wouldn't hamper his mission to feed guests—there were walls of cold cut meats tucked away in storage.

Princess Cruises is billed as the No. 1 cruise liner among food lovers, with myriad gastronomic options onboard around the clock. Guests are free to dine in any of the five themed fine dining rooms—Savoy, Pacific Moon, Vivaldi, Santa Fe and

From November to March, Diamond Princess is based out of Singapore while on its Southeast Asian tour



LUXURY LIVING

Highlights of amenities on board the Diamond Princess

A Soothing Soak

In addition to indoor stone baths and saunas, the **Izumi** (meaning 'spring') **onsen-themed bathhouse and spa** boasts breathtaking views of the sea from its outdoor hydrotherapy pool and exclusive sunbathing area. Sink into one of its soothing baths as the ship heads off to its next destination.

\$15 for 90 minutes

Take A Dip

Three **pools** and eight **whirlpool saunas** are strategically located next to casual dining restaurants Trident Grill, a burger and hot dog grill; Prego Pizzeria; and the poolside sundae bar. Pop in for a quick dip-and-soak to stave off the oncoming food coma.

Peace & Quiet

With so many family-friendly activities onboard, the **Sanctuary** offers grown-up guests a well-deserved, adults-only safe zone to relax in, with cushy beach chairs, attentive staff and a bit of peace and quiet.

Wellness Retreat

Besides the usual bevvvy of manicures, wellness and massage services,

Lotus Spa offers acupuncture for stress relief, cellulite reduction programmes and individualised personal training. And to work off all that sumptuous food, morning zumba and yoga classes are available at the gym.

Entertainment Galore

Guests are spoilt for choice in after-dinner entertainment on board, which range from live music in the cosy Wheelhouse bar to film screenings under the open skies. Catch one of Princess Cruise's original musical productions, courtesy of the in-house theatre troupe and world-class guest performers.



Clockwise from top Steamed Alaskan king crab legs from Crab Shack, one of Princess's speciality restaurants; Master chocolatier Norman Love's exquisite desserts; Executive chef Nilo Palma's culinary show; Seared diver scallops in ginger lime butter sauce; Kai Sushi's sashimi set menu



International—where they will find a diversity of cuisines, from grilled New York cut strip steak with green peppercorn sauce, tomato provençale, sautéed zucchini and lyonnaise potatoes next to Hainanese chicken rice and wanton soup. This is in addition to a lavish spread at every meal: breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea with exquisite tarts, cakes and scones with cream, and even round-the-clock room service—all free of charge.

DIVERSE PALATES

Which raises the question: how does chef Palma decide which cuisines are on the menu every day? Does it depend on the supplies available at each port? I imagine the chef trawling through the bustling markets of Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh until something catches his eye.

Not quite so romantic as that, it seems. Menus are at least two months in the making, and are conscientiously vetted by Princess's head office beforehand, keeping in mind the demographics of the guests.

"We are based in Singapore for the moment, but that doesn't mean most of the passengers are locals. It's a mix of Asians, Europeans, Australians and Americans. From this, we choose which cuisines we're going to prepare: A mix of local food from Singapore—some Malay and Chinese, for example—and some American and European choices so that we have a good balance," says Palma.

Similarly, supply quantities are carefully calculated months in advance. "On land, if you miss out one onion, you can just buy it from a store around the corner. When you're in the middle of the ocean, you can't just fly out on a helicopter to pick it up," he quips. On average, the ship orders over 110 tonnes of ingredients from countries like Italy, Scandinavia, France and the US.

But with such an international slate of guests, aren't spicy foods a contentious issue? According to chef Palma, spices and salt are reduced across the board during the ship's tour around Southeast Asia—at the moment, a vast majority of guests are Australians who generally have a lower tolerance for spicy foods. But several versions of the same dish can be prepared with varying degrees of spice to cater to individual taste buds, with some even omitting gluten, lactose and salt for guests with dietary restrictions.

GASTRONOMIC PASTIMES

For something more exclusive, the Diamond Princess offers speciality restaurants at an



Above Speciality restaurant Kai Sushi is especially popular during Diamond Princess's Japan season

additional charge. **Kai Sushi** serves up fresh sashimi and poke; Italian restaurant **Sabatini's** offers a luxurious menu of cheese, veal and seafood; and **Sterling Steakhouse's** richly marbled ribeye steaks and gourmet desserts by master chocolatier Norman Love are always a hit.

Meanwhile, for a small fee, wine lovers can take part in hosted wine tasting sessions featuring a selection of wines from the ship's cellar. Alternatively, pop by the ship's art auctions for a complimentary glass of bubbly and some afternoon retail therapy.

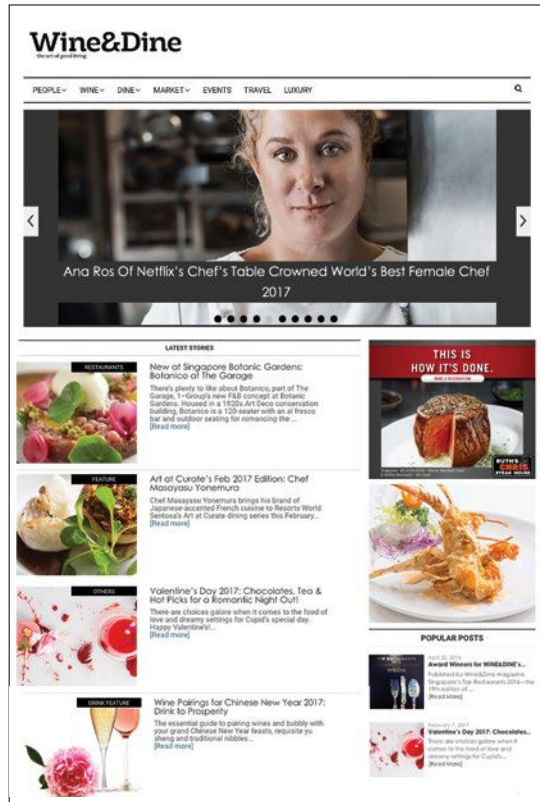
If you're feeling a little cooped up after days on the almost 300-metre long behemoth of a ship, Diamond ports at some of the top gastronomic destinations in Southeast Asia from November to March. Hop off for a quick jaunt (on your own, or tag along with organised shore excursions) into town for a bite of authentic Penang char kway teow, tom yam goong in the Bangkok heat, or beef pho in Ho Chi Minh City. (In the summer months, Diamond heads up north to East Asia for its Japan season.)

Back on board, in addition to the usual entertainment, you'll find foodie-centric ones as well. On each voyage, chef Palma helms lively and comic culinary demonstrations, and even hands out easy-to-follow recipes to an appreciative crowd. After which, guests are given an insider's tour of the ship's bustling galley which churns out over 2,500 kilogrammes of meat and fish every day.

Don't count on seeing him aboard Diamond Princess in the coming months though. He'll be heading the Majestic Princess's maiden voyage in May 2017, alongside a yet-to-be-named Michelin-starred chef from China. We can't wait to see what they come up with. **WD**

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Natural Wines: As Nature Intended

February 18, 2017 / 0 Comment



Unlike organic wines made without any addition of chemicals and using only organic material, or biodynamic wines where grapes are farmed sustainably with 'inputs of production' found on the farm, natural wines are made as 'nature intended'. In other words, the human touch is kept to the minimum in the cultivation and creation of natural wines.

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Wine feature:
As Nature
Intended



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Valentine's Day 2017: Chocolates, Tea & Hot Picks for a Romantic Night Out!

There are choices galore when it comes to the food of love and dreamy settings for Cupid's special day. Happy Valentine's!

Wine Pairings for CNY 2017: Drink to Prosperity

The essential guide to pairing wines and bubbly with your grand CNY feasts, requisite yu sheng and traditional nibbles



Art at Curate's Feb 2017 Edition: Chef Masayasu Yonemura

Chef Yonemura brings his brand of Japanese-accented French cuisine to RWS's Art at Curate dining series



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Feature:
New at Singapore
Botanic Gardens:
Botanico at The
Garage

New at Singapore Botanic Gardens: Botanico at The Garage

February 16, 2017 / 0 Comment



There's plenty to like about Botanico, part of The Garage, 1-Group's new F&B concept at Botanic Gardens. Housed in a 1920s Art Deco conservation building, Botanico is a 120-seater with an all-fresco bar and outdoor seating for romancing the stars



World's Hottest Restaurants: Reservations Required for 2017

December 23, 2016 / 0 Comment



Getting a table at one of these hallowed temples of gastronomy is a sport with a prize worth fighting for

With March set to unveil its doors in February 2017, one of the world's toughest restaurants to bag a table is waiting for its next chef. And if you're one of those for whom nabbing a seat at the world's best restaurant gets you as high as stepping a shrimp Kumamoto oyster—never fear. There are mountains for you to conquer yet.

Thanks to international restaurant awards, the real nature of world media and some guidebooks, some of the world's most exciting restaurants have achieved such fame that they are harder to get into than any five-league school. A few, like The French Laundry in Napa, are located off the beaten track, while others are right smack in the world's metropolitan: think Barcelona's El Celler de Can Roca or Tokyo's Sukiyabashi Jiro. But no matter the location, there are always the legends of dedicated foodies determined to get there.

Restaurants:
World's Hottest
Restaurant: Reservations
Required



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Wine and Dine Magazine SG

Congratulations!

Goodies we gave away in January

Kong Meifong won Antoinette's Queen's Yusheng in our Facebook draw



Norwegian salmon yusheng



Wine & Dine's January issue featured some amazing CNY ceremonious sweets, one 'guilty' pleasure being Antoinette's Queen's Yusheng (\$88 each). Two lucky readers won the Queen's Yusheng in our Facebook draw. Ten other lucky winners ushered in CNY this year on a healthy note with TungLok Seafood restaurant's Prosperity Yu Sheng (\$85 each) featuring Norwegian salmon yusheng.

W&D Giveaways

Coming up this month on our Facebook page! Keep your eyes peeled.

Check out chef Petrina Loh's omakase fusion menu at Morsels



Dinner for Two worth \$300 at Morsels

Treat yourself and a loved one to Chef Petrina Loh's omakase fusion menu and wine-pairing worth \$300 at Morsels restaurant. Look out for the restaurant review on our website too.

The Juicy Way's Office Treats

Look out for our giveaway on Facebook and you may just surprise your co-workers with Instagram-worthy treats from The Juicy Way. Check out our review in this issue's To Market (p.34).



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We have 10 Eva Solo Cool Wine Decanters **worth \$168 each** to give away!*

Keep up to date with the latest in food and wine with a year's subscription of *Wine & Dine* magazine. Sign up now and receive a **0.75L Eva Solo Cool Wine Decanter**, courtesy of Bibliotek Design Store (bibliotek.co). Made from mouth-blown glass, it comes with a detachable base that keeps wine chilled for up to four hours.

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POSTSCRIPT



Clockwise from top left

Chef Dharshan Munidasa, Ministry of Crab, Sri Lanka; Chef Daniel Ovidia, Bull & Tank Restaurant Group, Mexico; Chef Quentin Glabus, Canadian First Nations Chef Representative, Rio de Janeiro; Chef Jarno Eggen, De Groene Lantaarn restaurant, The Netherlands; Chef Biró Lajos, A Buja Disznó(k), Hungary

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Talent Show

Some of the world's best chefs will convene in Singapore for the World Gourmet Summit 2017

WORDS **CHARLENE CHOW**

The World Gourmet Summit (WGS), now into its 21st edition, is a titan fixture on Singapore's annual food calendar. This year, WGS reconvenes from 20 March to 16 April under the theme 'United Nations Gastronomic Assembly'.

This edition will see more than 12 masterchefs from around the world descending on Singapore. They include Mitch Lienard from three-Michelin-starred Manresa restaurant in California, who was last year's winner of the S. Pellegrino Young Chef award; Japanese-Sri Lankan chef Dharshan Munidasa, founder of acclaimed Japanese restaurant Nihonbashi in Colombo; and Canadian chef Quentin Glabus, who will showcase the unique flavours of aboriginal Canadian cuisine. Singapore-based chefs will also be getting into the act, as over 30 partner restaurants will be involved in the line-up of master classes, events and exclusive WGS menus. Sign up for events like a mezcal degustation master class at El Mero Mero and an Aussie craft beer dinner at Salted & Hung. Last but not least, there'll be the WGS Awards of Excellence held on 27 March, which will honour the year's top F&B and hospitality professionals. **WD**
worldgourmetsummit.com

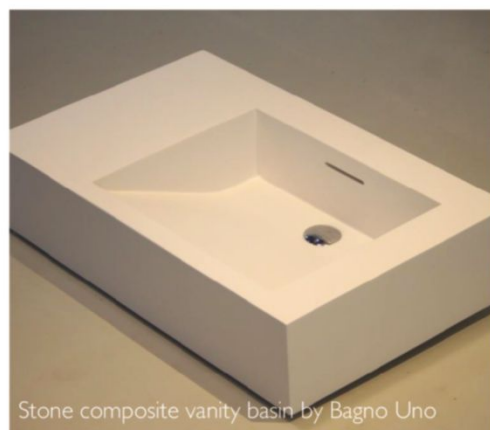
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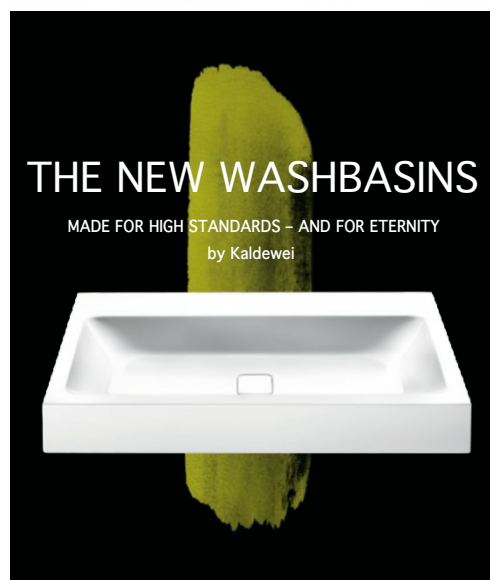
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