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GROWING THE GLORY DAYS

IT'S hardly credible today that anyone could have envisaged that Hong Kong's glory days would become a faded memory following the former British territory's handover to China in the late 1990s. The influx of mainland Chinese to Hong Kong over the past decade has changed the face of Asia's top shopping destination and it's now even more exciting and throbbing with activity than ever before. Last year, 35 million tourists flowed over the border to spend \$24.5 billion in the Special Administrative Region's (SAR) mega-malls, bars, hotels and restaurants.

In few other areas has their impact been more noticeable than in Hong

that rich Asian wine collectors drank Petrus and Coca-Cola. A growing number of Hong Kong wine shops have also morphed into leading educational centres where tourists can also pop in for a tasting such as The Flying Winemaker and Amo Eno, the only Hong Kong wine bar fitted with LCD tables which offers up to 70 tasting wines.

The Nose Wine School in Central is operated by Stefano Yim and operates as a wine bar when classes end. Champagne, Burgundy and Bordeaux remain hot favourites in Hong Kong and the etc wine shops cater to all three "addictions". Bordeaux etc is in Causeway Bay and stocks over 1200

biodynamic French wines. But for the ultimate French treat, Monsieur Chatte has two shops in Sheung Wan and Tsim Sha Tsui which offer French goodies such as foie gras and galette des Roi, and a truly smashing wine collection from Louis Roederer Cristal vintages to Laurent Miquel Viognier Verite from Languedoc.

The only major tourist activity which rivals shopping in Hong Kong is eating. Over 40 restaurants boast Michelin stars and one recipient is Tim Ho Wan (timhowan.com) with four locations across town. No reservations and it's eyeball-to-eyeball with your fellow diners but you won't munch into better dim sum

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Kong's thirst for wine. Henry Tang, the former Chief Secretary for Administration of Hong Kong and one of the world's greatest wine collectors, removed the taxes on imported wines in 2008. Within a few years, the SAR became the world's number one auction market for fine wines, with sales passing \$US229 million in 2011. Over the past two years, the number of wine store chains in Hong Kong has doubled and Watson's is the clear market leader.

For the wine tourist, Honkers has become one of the greatest tasting destinations. The great names of British wine retailing - Berry Bros & Rudd and Corney & Barrow - are very much in evidence, as are a standing army of international wine consultants. The days are long gone when people joked

vintages, while Champagne etc and Burgundy etc are in Central.

As the South China Morning Post pointed out recently, Hong Kong has become a petri dish for wine retail and it's not unusual these days to see wine bars and shops touting bottlings from Crimea and Wales. My druthers nearly always involve a tight circle of some of Hong's best specialist wine shops such as Bacchus & Century in Lan Kwai Fong for those with very expensive tastes. For the best Californian boutique wines, head to the CV Wine Bar in Wan Chai, where you can sample reasonably priced wines from the bar's Enomatic dispensers.

La Cabane a Vin is a recreation of an authentic wine bistro in Hollywood Road and specialises in organic and

from lor mei gai (rice dumplings) to siu mai (pork and prawn dumplings) and char siu bao (barbequed pork buns).

Paco Roncero is the protege of Ferran Adria, legendary chef at El Bulli in Barcelona which won the best restaurant in the world title five times. He now runs the kitchen at View 62 (view62.com) in Wan Chai's Hopewell Center, a revolving restaurant that takes 110 minutes to scan the Hong Kong skyline. The menu veers from Chinese-inspired to Spanish, with key dishes such as Hong Kong octopus salad and caldo di cocido, a twist on the famous Spanish beef stew.

For true Chinese fusion, "demon chef" Alvin Cheung has the style nailed at Bo Innovation (boinnovation.com). Sporting spiky hair and tats, Leung is treated like a rock god for his signature dan dan

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noodles and Chinese take on foie gras.

If hot bar addresses have become need-to-know travel info in every city, magnify the trend 10-fold in Hong Kong. Quinary (quinary.hk) is the current front-runner in the must-go stakes. Bar tender Antonio Lai claims the bar is the first micro-distillery in Hong Kong and it shows in trademark "food-science" drinks such as bloody mary with wasabi-infused vodka and Earl Grey caviar martini.

South America is having a moment on the Hong Kong bar scene with recent openings such as Havana Bar (havanabar.com.hk), with the largest selection of rums in town, and The Roger Room - as in jolly as you're going to be after a couple of Peruvian ciscos. Molecular cocktails are the rage at Rula Bula (rulabula.com.hk), run by Irishman Cathal Kiely. Open until very late it's the place to be for the top DJs and plenty of dance room.


The Hong Kong outposts of the leading multinational hotel chains are legend even among their sister properties, but I am a big fan of HK's boutique properties. If you don't want to pay \$\$\$\$ prices, The Fleming (thefleming.com) in Wan Chai is on-the-money for business trips with a leisure add-on. With only 66 rooms, this is as stylish as it gets without paying big bucks.

The Hullett House Hotel (hulletthouse.com) centres on the redevelopment of the former Marine Police HQ. The stucco 19th century facade also houses boutiques and restaurants, in addition to the hotel's 10 themed suites from English Regency to up-market Chinese. Part of the Leading Hotels of the World Group, so luxury is a given. Have a pint in the Mariner's Rest, a pub housed in the former holding cells. 

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