

Hong Kong is a melting pot of cultures. I have been very impressed by the number of cosy yet sophisticated restaurants that have recently surfaced, the result of classically-trained chefs combining their craft with Asian experiences to create their own culinary ventures.

At the helm of the kitchen at **Upper Modern Bistro** (new one-star entry in 2015 Michelin guide) is chef **Philippe Orrico** who previously worked at Pierre (Pierre Gagnaire's eponymous restaurant). You cannot miss the dramatic ceiling covered with egg-shaped "petals", coloured in white, grey and blue, reflecting the chef's love for eggs. The long, heavy-framed mirrors above the cushioned benchseats recall a feature of the traditional French bistro, but the rest of the decor is minimalist simplicity, almost Scandinavian-like. Start your meal by sharing some "bites" - smoked salmon toast with cauliflower puree and avruga caviar, pig's trotter dip with crispy toast, mini veal burgers and foie-gras creme brulee. For starters, try the mushroom soup with beaufort cubes that melt as the hot soup is poured, and the 63 degree egg, with sauteed mushroom, crab meat, bellota ham and brioche. The succulent roasted half chicken, served with truffle jus is a signature dish and if you are a pasta maniac, do not miss the artichoke macaroni or the mushroom tagliatelle, served with 63 degree egg, cheese and Parma ham! For me, the highlight is always the cheese selected by **Jeremy Evrard**, the general manager and "cheeseman" (he was previously at Michelin-starred Caprice at HK's Four Seasons Hotel). Evrard's intimate knowledge of cheese and

repertoire of stories of the cheesemakers never fails to impress and only perfectly "a point" cheese is served! The bites are \$HK80-\$HK100 (\$A12 - \$A15), the starters \$HK150-\$HK200 (\$A22 - \$A30) and the mains range from \$HK180-\$HK600 (\$A27 - \$A89). The cheese selections are \$HK168 (\$A25) for three-cheese, \$HK248 (\$A37) for five-cheese and the ultimate Upper Cheese board served on Bavarian wood at \$HK348 (\$A51). The reasonably-priced wine list offers choices from France and elsewhere, or bring your bottle at corkage of \$HK250 (\$A37) a bottle. 6-14 Upper Station St, Sheung Wan, HK. Phone +852 2517 0977.

For a modern interpretation of British, **Aberdeen Street Social** could be your destination. Located inside PMQ (former Police Married Quarters in Central), it is the latest project by celebrity chef **Jason Atherton** and local entrepreneur **Yenn Wong**, who have already taken HK by storm with their more casual and low-key dining concepts 22 Ships and Ham & Sherry, on Wanchai's Ship Street. Aberdeen Street Social signifies the celebrity chef's first foray into local fine dining. The ground floor bar offers a terrace and an alternative simple menu. Space is intimate for fine dining upstairs. Highly recommended starters include slow-cooked hen's egg with black pudding, crispy pig's ear and pickled king oyster mushrooms, CLT (crabmeat, lettuce and lightly soured tomatoes), beetroot-cured salmon with salt-baked beetroot and creme fraiche and roasted quail breast and leg, sauteed foie gras, peach and Chinese almonds. For mains, try braised ox-cheek with roasted bone marrow, sourdough crumb and horseradish mash, or the

roasted sea bass with cauliflower couscous. Finish with JAAL 75% (chocolate, banana, calamansi and Madras curry spice). Three-course dinner for two is around \$HK1500 (\$A222). The wine list offers comprehensive choices across Old and New worlds, including some staggering prices for bottles of Chateau Petrus. 35 Aberdeen Street, Central HK. Phone +852 2866 0300.

And a final example of convergence of cultures is Michelin-starred **Yu Lei**, Chinese restaurant with Japanese executive chef, **Miki Ishigawa**. Located in Hung Hom, Yu Lei is off the beaten track but the wine and food service is first-rate. Yu Lei uses top ingredients and delivers exotic interpretations of traditional Cantonese and Shanghaiese cuisines, including sweet and sour pork made with three types of vinegar (Japanese apple vinegar, Zhenjiang black vinegar and aged vinegar), steamed pork dumplings using fresh prawns and the Japanese dried sakura prawns, whole suckling Iberico pig, and stir-fried ramen a la Shanghaiese. The dessert of almond bun is like a refined version of the Japanese melon bun (or Chinese pineapple bun), filled with delicately-flavoured almond milk paste. Wines by the glass include a Gris de Koshu by Grace Winery, Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan and a Junmai Daiginjo. The wine list is extensive and includes some pricey items such as 1978 Romanee-Conti at \$HK290,000 (\$A43,000) and a 1961 Chateau Petrus at \$HK190,000, \$28,000! Definitely worth the schlep. 5/F, The Harbourfront Landmark, 11 Wan Hoi Street, Hung Hom. Phone +852 3746 2788.

Looking for an alternative to the usual team-building dinner in town? I highly recommend the collaborative space at **Umami Concepts**. Located in a charming and historic colonial low-rise, Umami Concepts provides a spacious culinary workshop, dining and sitting area, where guests can learn to cook together. Whatever culinary theme you desire, chef **Nolan Ledarney** will help you plan and make sure that you and your guests get the most of the collaborative experience and none of the stress. Formerly the executive chef at the Canadian embassy in Beijing and Tokyo, followed by a short stint at Michelin-starred L'Osier in Tokyo, Ledarney and his team bring together a unique set of experiences to help shape your evening. With free corkage, guests can indulge in the experience of high quality wine glasses, all sponsored by Zalto. If cooking is not your thing, the space is also available for other collaborative experiences. By appointment only, 35 Bonham Rd, Mid Levels, HK; info@umamiconcepts.com; www.umamicollaborative.com.



Left: Upper Modern Bistro Interior.