



IF CHASING Michelin stars and fine dining ambiance are not on the checklist, then Hong Kong presents a plethora of options for those seeking out the hideaway kitchens of local heroes. **Neighborhood** is the latest creation by classically French-trained **David Lai** (behind On Lot 10 and Bistronomique). At the corner of a bustling courtyard, best approached from alleyway Man Hing Lane, off Peel St (utterly obscured from its Hollywood Rd address), Neighborhood is boutique dining with 15 covers and bar area, with a private room which accommodates maximum of 18 people in cosy seating. As discreet as its location, the simple, elegant decor is depicted through the sleek exploitation of aluminium and various shades and textures of wood. The concise menu changes weekly according to seasonal ingredients, but maintains Lai's classics such as delicacies based on his passion for innards, fish in bouillabaisse and various pasta creations. All the dishes can easily be shared and the menu is structured in your preferred order. Start with the black pork rilletes with truffle, with much less fat than the traditional version (\$HK160/\$A29), follow on with the fresh burrata, with heirloom tomatoes and balsamic vinegar (\$HK165/\$A30) and do not miss the smoked eggplant caviar with Cantabrian anchovy, ingeniously lifted with orange peel chunks (\$HK160/\$29). Keen followers of Lai's cuisine will not miss his signature pasta dishes, updated seasonally. The current menu includes sea urchin capellini "carbonara" (\$HK200/\$A36), with creamy sea-spray in every mouthful and for fans of gelatinous beef tendons, the intensely-flavoured baked macaroni with truffled beef shank ragu (\$HK185/\$34). Daily meat/roast and daily fish in bouillabaisse are priced according to market. Leave room for the chocolate palette (\$HK75/\$A14) - creamy rich chocolate ganache on a thin, slightly salty crust of crumbled chocolate cookies, utterly divine! The two wine lists are equally concise: one for bottle selection and the other a weekly list with by-the-glass options (around \$HK120-\$HK165/\$A22-\$A30)

featuring a more eclectic selection such as Cremant d'Alsace, Spanish Godello, Cote Chalonnaise white and a Lebanese red. Corkage is \$HK300/\$A54 a bottle and there is no service charge for parties under 8 people. Tip: book the second seating at 8:30pm to avoid being rushed; phone +852 2617 0891.

Every year I eagerly anticipate the return of the Yunnan mushrooms to the menu of **Kin's Kitchen**, owned by local food writer **Lau Kin Wai** and his son. The mushroom season from Yunnan typically spans a little over two months, starting from early July. Kin's Kitchen is known for home-style Cantonese cuisine, occasionally introducing other rustic regional dishes. A few variations on the theme of scrambled egg, Yunnan ham and Yunnan mushroom feature, but my favourite version is the one with the earthy and pungent Ganba fungus (\$HK312/\$A57). For a milder and fleshier version, try the Termite Mushroom (\$HK208/\$A38). Chef Lau's signature starters include drunken abalone (\$HK192/\$A35 for four pieces), deep-fried battered oysters (\$HK128/\$A23), pigeon slow-cooked in Shaoxing wine (\$HK118/\$A21 per pigeon) and pan-fried sweet corn with soya sauce (\$HK68/\$A12) - that modest sweet corn could be so incredibly tasty! If there is only room for one main course, then smoked oven-baked chicken (whole chicken \$HK378/\$A69; half \$HK190/\$A34) is a must. For a taste of traditional Cantonese home-style cooking, try pan-fried patties of minced pork with salted fish (\$HK110/\$A20) and stir-fried bitter melon with salted egg yolk and minced pork (\$HK90/\$A16). Corkage is \$HK200/\$A36 a bottle; phone +852 2571 0913.

A favourite haunt of local affluent and wine connoisseurs is **Old Bazaar** by chef **Billy Chung**. The decor is a far cry from posh dining and the sole attraction is chef Chung's self-styled fusion south-east Asian food, and to share a glass of wine with the chef who has developed a keen palate for fine wine over the years of patronage by local wine collectors! Some of chef Chung's signatures are creamy drunken foie gras, soaked in Shaoxing wine, chilled Malayan squid served with chilli

and wasabi sauce, pan-fried black and white peppered ox tongue, braised giant grouper, fried oatmeal prawns, fluffy black truffle fried rice, thick egg noodles with Belachan sauce and the must-have Hainan chicken with rice infused with chicken fat, lemongrass and ginger. A typical bill comes to about \$HK380/\$A69 - \$HK450/\$A82 per person, depending on what you order. There is no corkage charge and glassware is adequate - an absolute haven for food and wine lovers; phone +852 2893 3998.

Model-turned-chef **Esther Sham** (aka chef Tata) has delighted fans with a new dining concept; **Maison Es** exudes feminine elegance portrayed by the multitude of floral arrangements and motifs, matched with pastel colours to endorse the ambiance of a chic tearoom. Every dish reflects chef Tata's signature light touch, with influence from her Chinese roots. Recommended starters include the heaven-in-a-jar coddled egg on black truffle mash (\$HK120/\$A22) and crispy foie gras and fig wontons, drizzled with sweet balsamic (\$HK190/\$A34). For a lighter main course, try the Yuzu duck breast (\$HK260/\$A47) - tender duck breast lifted by citrus Yuzu flavours, served with shredded daikon cooked in mirin for extra freshness. The Hanger steak with champignon jus (\$HK290/\$53) is the ultimate choice for meat lovers. Packing dessert and cheese courses into one, go for the bruleed brie (\$HK140/\$A25) or settle for a more conventional variation on Valrhona chocolate fondant, with fresh mint cream at the centre of the melting chocolate interior (\$HK160/\$A29). Never too old for Nutella! The two-course weekend brunch at \$HK298/\$A54 (or \$HK388/\$A70 with Mimosa) offers a range of sweet and savoury choices. Highly recommended is the home-baked muffin trio or grapefruit and "Thai" ger prawn cocktail in green curry cocktail sauce, followed by Nutella and banana soldiers served with caramelised banana creme, or Satay Wagyu beef cheese burger. Chef Tata also moved her famous private kitchen Ta Pantry to the same site, with maximum seating for 20; phone +852 2521 8011.

Above: Hainan chicken & truffle fried rice at Old Bazaar.