

melbournegrapevine

HILARY McNEVIN

ONE of the country's most revered chefs has opened in Crown, his first Melbourne outpost. A classically trained chef has opened his first solo venture in our inner-north and a much-loved St Kilda restaurant has expanded to open a second venue in the city. There's never a dull moment in the Melbourne dining scene and the last few months have highlighted this once again.

Award-winning chef **David Thompson**, who has been awarded Michelin stars at his London restaurant Nahm, opened **Long Chim** in Melbourne's Crown complex in February. After the success of the Long Chim concept in Perth, Singapore and Sydney, he has been warmly welcomed by tourists moving through Crown and the local Melbourne dining audience. The name Long Chim means to sample and taste, and the menu is intended to encourage just that. The food is approachable and unfussy - in Thai terms - think classic Thai street food and you can find familiar dishes such as green curry, laksa and pad thai, and a sweep of other classic dishes that you may not have jumped into exploring yet such as the orange curry of ling fish. There's the crunch of fried prawns with herbs, shallots and chilli or the slippery slide of thin rice noodles with chicken, prawn, peanut and chilli. Thompson has dedicated his cooking life to the study of



Thai food and the dishes are a textured and complex embrace for a cuisine that demands respect and the deep understanding that he has gained. It's the perfect place to start for those who know little about Thai food, and a welcome stop for those who love authentic flavours outside of Bangkok. The room is loud and chaotic like the streets of Thailand and the plain wooden tables and simple red chairs give way for the food to do the talking. Crown Melbourne, 8 Whiteman St, Southbank; phone (03) 9292 5777.

Pierre Kodhja is a name you may not be familiar with but the Algerian-born chef who moved to Australia in 2001 has been slowly and certainly creating a reputation for consistently good food. He was at a restaurant called Canvas in Hawthorn before moving to the Mornington Peninsula and working at The Terminus in the Flinders Hotel where he gained and retained one-hat in *The Age Good Food Guide* for four consecutive years. He has now gone out on his own, opening **Camus** in Northcote - in the thick of hipster-land. But Kodhja is way more than a mere trend, he's created a venue that is classic by design - bare timber tables, black tiles and an open kitchen - and he is putting forward a menu inspired by his Algerian upbringing but given a solid stamp of relevance with his classic French training and strong technique; he has cooked at Michelin-starred London restaurants Ma Cuisine and Bistrot Bruno Loubet. The goat is fast becoming the signature dish, breaking down the whole carcass himself, he braises large hunks of the meat until it falls off the bone and serves them in a perfectly reduced jus dotted with Iranian apricots to finish. Other dishes may include calamari tubes filled with prawns and mushroom borak, and there's a succulent baked whole snapper

served with okra and a vibrant chermoula and the duck bastilla is sweet with the additions of almonds and fruit chutney. And you must save room and time for the Turkish Delight souffle with pistachio baklava, halva ice cream, a combination of light, airy, sweet and subtle. 61 High St, Northcote; phone (03) 9486 3063.

The first floor of a former office building on Collins St in the CBD has become a den of spicy, Vietnamese cooking and savvy cocktails. **Uncle Collins Street** opened recently and is owned by **Rene Spence** and his business partner, chef **Dai Duong** who, three years ago opened Uncle in St Kilda. They were quickly taken on by the St Kilda community, the area was very ready for a smart dining room serving schmick Vietnamese dishes so the pair thought it was time to expand and took the bold step of moving into the centre of the action in the city.

Slightly smaller than its south-side sibling, Uncle Collins Street has large fold-out windows that open overlooking the treetops of Collins St. Like St Kilda there's quirky touches of cane furniture and pink and orange lights, but only some of the menu has made the trip with the boys deciding to create mostly a new menu. The very popular pig's ear banh mi and hapuka betel leaf have made the move but most of the dishes here are new. One in particular that has punters talking is the burrata with heirloom tomatoes, pickled papaya, Thai basil and puffed wild rice. And they've dedicated a cocktail to their location on Collins. The Paris End is a mix of gin, basil syrup, lychee, bitters, lime and prosecco. Level 1, 15 Collins St, Melbourne; phone (03) 9654 0829. 



Top: Stir fried glass noodles from Long Chim restaurant.

Left: Scallops from Camus restaurant.