

brisbane grapevine

LIZZIE LOEL

"If nothing changes, nothing changes." These are the wise words of veteran chef and restaurateur **Philip Johnson** after declaring he was moving his stalwart CBD fringe bistro to greener pastures after 22 years insitu.

The Gasworks complex located in Newstead is the place de jour, a new, leafy dining hub tucked between Fortitude Valley and the river. Haven is an all-new highrise development of luxury apartments with retail arcades below, situated directly across from the Gasometre which doubles as an outdoor venue at night. Due to deliver some fabulous new venues, Haven will open in early 2018 with **E'cco** 2.0 swinging open fresh new doors alongside some other industry talent. Head chef **Simon Palmer** will make the move across to the new site along with many of Johnson's loyal brigade. A bright, fresh interior will be the backdrop for a pared back menu. No more multiple components forming complex dishes - Johnson and Palmer plan to keep the menu and plating very simple. Think a piece of fish with some walnut and red pepper dip, a slice of lemon and not much else. This concept isn't new for Johnson who's credo has always been to source the best ingredients and don't mess too much with them. Add to that the char and smokiness of coal cooking and you have some very tasty morsels to look forward to. Of course the extensive cellar, amassed over the past couple of decades and includes an all-star line up of old and new world labels as well as some newer age organic and natural wines from Australia, Italy and Johnson's native New Zealand, will make the short trip to the new digs. Last service at the old CBD site will be December 23, with the new venue opening its doors in February. 63 Skyring Tce Newstead; phone (07) 3831 8344.

Also opening in Haven is **Salt Meat Cheese**, a Sydney-based, family-run company that specialises



in Italian cuisine, cooking classes and its signature dish - Flaming Cheese Wheel Pasta - pasta tossed inside a giant wheel of warm reggiano.

There's also a new concept by the team at **Jocelyn's Provisions** who will be firing up the rotisserie to provide delicious lunches and dinners to go alongside their signature range of baked goods and beautiful artisan breads. **Betty's Burgers**, who originally hail from Noosa, have also secured a spot so there's a plethora of dining options. Johnson's Irish-born wife **Mary Randles** opened **Madame Rouge** in early 2017 on the site of the former Gordita in the Mac & Ann complex just off buzzing James Street.

"The Madame" recently received a one-hat rating in the Good Food Guide for 2018 for its classic bistro menu, the inspiration and foundation of which has been set by Johnson and his team. Randles recently introduced a three-course "Prix Fixe" menu for the time sensitive which covers all the Parisian bistro essentials finishing you up with a delicious creme brulee. It's still very much a classic French bistro - Randles has decked the place out in flowing floor-to-ceiling red velvet drapes creating a moody, candle-lit space with circular, leather-clad dining booths and a giant bar that divides the room in half.

The menu follows the traditional layout of appetisers of oysters shucked to order, snails in garlic butter and some charcuterie served with artisan breads, pickles and housemade condiments. Entrees come next and you can expect more classics like goat's cheese soufflé, pan fried quail, seared scallops in their half shell and duck liver parfait with sauternes jelly and toasted brioche.

There's a grill section with a neat little collection of steak which you can combine with your choice of bearnaise, green peppercorn, mushroom or café de Paris butter.

Of course French fries, Paris mash or potato au gratin is offered alongside your steak. 100 Mclachlan St Brisbane; phone (07) 3252 8881.

Change is also afoot for **Happy Boy**, a spicy and super popular Spring Hill bolthole, the brainchild of brothers **Cameron** and **Jordan Votan** who have brought Brisbane diners authentic Sichuan cooking in their casual eatery housed in the loading dock of the former Little Tokyo, Brisbane's oldest Japanese restaurant.

The pair has decided to relocate from Spring Hill to the heart of Fortitude Valley into a significantly larger space (the new venue can seat 300) and one that can accommodate their brand new wok, imported from Hong Kong that requires triple certification and three times the gas a normal wok uses. It's hard to imagine a better menu than that on offer at the old site and happily for loyal fans, this won't change with the new location. The Votans will gradually add new dishes once the dust settles, with inspiration coming from Xinjiang and Canton provinces albeit with their signature, contemporary twist. The wine offering will also get a significant upgrade. Cameron owns Spokenwine, an online wine distribution business in partnership with three colleagues. Spokenwine will increase the offering significantly and there will also be a new focus on spirits and craft beers, of which six will be on tap. A clipped supper menu will be offered from Thursday to Saturday from 9.30pm until midnight and brunch will be served from Wednesday to Sunday featuring breakfast bao's, wok-fried eggs and fruit-infused sago pudding. As with Happy Boy Spring Hill, and their second venue, **Greenglass** (co-owned by the brothers and two of the Spokenwine crew), the new venue will take minimalist decor to a new level. Concrete walls remain unadorned and a vast, tree-lined wooden deck out the front will serve diners and drinkers well in the long hot months of the Brisbane summer. 1 East St, Fortitude Valley; phone 0413 246 890.

Top: Profiteroles tonka bean and chestnut ice cream, hot chocolate sauce from Madame Rouge Bar+Bistro.

Left: Ginger cream, brown sugar meringue, pumpkin, quince sorbet from e'cco Bistro.

