

# hong konggrapevine

LUCY JENKINS



IT'S typhoon season in Hong Kong now, where without warning the heavens open and suddenly the streets empty, with people rushing to take shelter under almost anything - a strategically placed plastic bag, an overhanging drain and even empty birdcages swinging violently in the sudden gusts.

The sensible thing to do if you find yourself similarly stuck is to head to the nearest local eatery and just sit it out. If you happen to be in the western part of Wan Chai, say, in the suddenly hugely gentrified area of Star Street, head over to St Francis Street to **Francis**, a new Mediterranean/Middle Eastern neighbourhood joint which at any hour of the day is already reassuringly busy. Grab a seat at the bar and peruse the wine list. Five reds and white by glass and carafe, but for a more involved wine experience, ask for the secret wine list, a leather-bound book which will be presented to you by **Simone Rossi**, (formerly of **121 BC** in nearby Soho and **The Remedy** in London)

where he handwrites all of the wine he has personally tasted and favoured. A healthy mix of Italian in homage to Rossi's roots. **Asher Goldstein** from a previous Wan Chai haunt, My House, has dreamt up some of his beloved childhood dishes from Israel - don't miss the smoked carrots with honey and almond, for example. Elsewhere, there are the obligatory starters of hummus made the Tel Aviv way - thicker than the usual commercial offerings - and smoked aubergine with yoghurt and chilli. The starters and side dishes are pretty hefty so make sure you save room for a main such as another Israeli culinary jewel - chicken schnitzel, with za'ater and aioli. Francis, 4 & 6 St. Francis Street, Wan Chai; phone +852 3101 9521, [www.francis.com.hk](http://www.francis.com.hk).

Can there be no stopping the Blacksheep Group? The collective name behind some of the better openings in recent months - a new incarnation of La Vache! and the New Punjab Club has now introduced **Osteria Marzia**, a colourful Italian restaurant, taking hints from the country's seaside regions from Campania through Amalfi and Puglia all the way down to southern Sicily. The beauty of Italian cuisine relies on its simplicity, and this is just what you get with the dishes. From baby squid fritti and dishes centred on the humble artichoke (when it's in season), to chitarra pasta with Boston lobster and then swordfish Palermo, everything is done freshly and to order, kidding you for a second that you could be in the Italian Riviera, rather than the ground floor of the Fleming Hotel. Chef **Luca Marinelli**, who came

over from Isono and the Buenos Aires Polo Club, has few dishes of each (four pasta, six mains, five desserts, etc) but what is on the menu has been crafted with passion and energy - just how Italian food should be. Osteria Marzia, G/F The Fleming, 41 Fleming Rd, Wan Chai; phone +852 3607 2253, [www.osteriamarzia.com.hk](http://www.osteriamarzia.com.hk).

With new restaurants popping up all the time, it's pretty much guaranteed that one in three will be in Sai Ying Pun, the area that continually is under gentrification but still manages to hold fiercely on to its local roots. **Brut!** has sashayed its way on to Second St with quite a bit of buzz behind it. A partnership with Iberian ham specialists Pata Negra House, led by Camille Lisette Glass promises to be the new spot to nibble on Spanish-style tapas. If the words ham and cheese are already music to your ears then look no further than the chestnut and acorn-fed Iberico 48-month ham, plus (it claims) the widest selection of Spanish cheeses available in Hong Kong. Brut! also stocks a healthy selection of wine from Spain and elsewhere, along with some punchy cocktails. The space is small, but like so many other Hong Kong restaurants, Brut! manages to use every available centimetre - making it teeny but teeming. Brut! 1 Second St, Sai Ying Pun, Hong Kong; phone +852 3460 5863.



Top: Food from Osteria Marzia restaurant.  
Left: Food from Brut! restaurant.  
Above: Food from Francis restaurant.