



SINGAPORE

Pasta at Gunther's. From left: The interior of Wine Garage; chef Thomas Mayr of Les Amis; inside Wacha.



The Lion City's Hottest New Tables. In Southeast Asia's most dynamic restaurant scene, here are four noteworthy additions. PLUS: Where to go for dessert. *By* JENNIFER CHEN

GUNTHER'S

Helmed by Belgian chef Gunther Hubrechen, who once served as Alain Passard's sous chef at the Michelin three-star L'Arpège in Paris, this eponymous restaurant is proudly and emphatically French. In fact, stepping into this six-month-old spot, you might suffer a temporary moment of geographical confusion and forget that you're in the tropics. Swathed in charcoal grey, the 25-seat dining room conjures up images of Europe—specifically the 16th Arrondissement

in Paris—with its heavy drapes, oxblood-leather chairs and finely wrought Murano crystal wall lamps. It's perfect for an intimate rendezvous—or the hushed appreciation of haute cuisine. Hubrechen delivers impeccable French food, but with a light, restrained touch that allows the quality of each individual ingredient to shine through. **THE HIGHS** Cold angel's hair pasta with oscietra caviar; lamb with ratatouille; and apple tart. The restaurant's freshly baked ficelle with

its fine crackling crust is alone worth a trip. **THE LOWS** While friendly and accommodating, the staff is not as well versed with the food or the wine list as you'd expect from an establishment of this caliber. 36 Purvis St.; 65/6338-8955; lunch for two with wine S\$180.

LES AMIS

After undergoing a S\$2.5 million makeover and acquiring a new chef (whose predecessor was, coincidentally, Gunther Hubrechen), this deeply venerated establishment reopened to



Choice Eateries

From left: Pang Kok Keon, the pastry mastermind at Canelé; a burger at Wine Garage; the dining room at Gunther's; Les Amis restaurant.



much fanfare last September. Gone is the restaurant's former stately décor. In its place is a much lighter—though discreetly opulent—look: burgundy walls, marble floors and Venetian chandeliers. Chef Thomas Mayr has worked with the likes of gastronomic giants Charlie Trotter and David Bouley. Hailing from the German-speaking region of South Tyrol in northern Italy, Mayr freely borrows from his native cuisine as well as gastronomic traditions closer to the neighborhood, as displayed in a delightful amuse-bouche that consisted of a thin crepe rolled into a cone and filled with *ikura* (salmon roe), toro and horseradish mousse. **THE HIGHS** Chilean sea bass with fennel, swimming in its own stock (entrée and soup, rolled into one); Maine lobster with cherry tomatoes and haricot

verts; and champagne soup with elderflower essence and berries that was somewhere between a liquid and a jelly. But the restaurant's real glory lies in its 101-page wine list, which has whole pages devoted to Bordeaux Premier Cru and Chateau d'Yquem. **THE LOWS** The ravioli with mushrooms and butter lettuce were leaden despite the chef's Italian origins. *No. 02-16, Shaw Centre, 1 Scotts Rd.; 65/6733-2225; lunch for two with wine S\$311.*

WACHA

This recently opened sliver of a store devoted to selling exquisite Japanese ceramics, lacquerware and textiles isn't technically a restaurant. But on weekdays, owner Maya Takahashi dishes out Japanese comfort food. Sunday is the real treat, as she hands

over the space to Danny Chu, a former foreign currency trader turned caterer, who turns the space into a private kitchen focused on *shojin ryoroi*, or Zen Buddhist cuisine. Chu, an endearingly beatific presence, has been studying under Zen masters in Japan for the past four years, absorbing the techniques and philosophy behind this spiritual fare. Given the restrictions (no meat, dairy, eggs, garlic or onion and limited use of seasonings), his cooking features surprisingly forceful flavors. **THE HIGHS** Eggplant with sesame; *goma* (arrowroot and sesame) tofu with wasabi; and miso soup with daikon. You also eat from gorgeous bowls produced by Fukagawa, porcelain producers who've been supplying the Imperial family since 1910. **THE LOWS** Zen food isn't for everyone, »



especially committed carnivores. *14 Ann Siang Road; 65/6438-1553; reservations are a must for Chu's private kitchen; lunch for two with tea S\$101.*

WINE GARAGE

The latest venture by the team behind the wildly successful microbrewery Brewerkz, this restaurant, which opened in late 2006, touts a more sophisticated menu and sleeker surroundings. The long, narrow dining room is kitted up in silver chrome and wood; rows of wine bottles suspended in metal racks line one side, while on the other are enormous chalk boards with amusing quotes about wine (including one from the comically misanthropic hotelier in the British comedy *Fawlty Towers*). But the place to sit is outdoors, where you can take in the view of the restored shophouses that line Robertson Quay. New Hampshire-born Travis Masiero runs the kitchen, which excels at simple, hearty dishes. **THE HIGHS** Hot smoked Scottish salmon with aioli, herbs and toast; the burger with aged cheddar and hand-cut fries; and gnocchi with market greens. **THE LOWS** The service is sometimes

scattershot. Avoid the menu's more ambitious offerings: the veal cheeks with polenta, fava beans and gremolata arrived overcooked, and the flavors were muddled. Pick your wine carefully; the cheaper bottles can disappoint. *No. 01-07, Riverside Point, 30 Merchant Rd.; 65/6533-3188; dinner for two with wine S\$183.*

TWO FOR DESSERT

With two popular outlets under its belt, **Canelé Pâtisserie Chocolaterie** has opened a third (*No. 81-82, B1, Raffles City Shopping Centre; 252 North Bridge Rd.; 65/6334-7377; dessert and coffee for two S\$23*), giving you more opportunities to indulge in pastry chef Pang Kok Keon's creations. Don't miss his salty caramel macarons (*S\$1.80 each*)—the perfect union of sweet and savory, crisp and gooey. If you want to end a meal with a cheese plate, visit to **La Fromagerie** (*5 Mohamed Sultan Rd.; 65/6732-6269; cheese plate S\$14*). With around 150 cheeses, the shop boasts one of the region's largest collections. Try the pecorino with black truffles and the Soumaintrain, a pungent, rich cheese from Burgundy. **+**

Sweet or Savory?
From above left:
Macaroons from
Canelé; chevre at La
Fromagerie;
Canelé's tempting
pastry case. Below:
Wine Garage.

