



TOUCH THE HEART
Yú Cuisine's Chilli Crab
Tart. Inset: the dish's
creator Chef Chiu Ka-wai.



WHEN LESS IS MORE

Diners are discovering there's big taste in small bites. Vicki Yang downsizes to meet the culinary challenge

Sociologists once argued they could track the health of an economy by the length of women's skirts. Today, perhaps, the size of the plates we use at mealtimes is a better indicator. In times of slow economic growth, it makes sense to be cautious, after all. What's more, smaller plates match the zeitgeist, with many restaurants catering for diners who find appetisers more appealing – and healthier – than entrées.

The Cantonese, who originated the culinary art of dim sum, have long understood this fact. At Chinese seafood, dim sum, grill and champagne-bar restaurant Yú Cuisine at The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands, chilli crab – one of Singapore's best-known dishes – is reduced to the size of a tart. "We found that customers don't really eat crab for lunch," says restaurant owner Jun Low "But they can now have a taste of what it's all about in a tart."

SAVOUR *dine*

“Everyone who eats here says the food has a home-cooked taste to it. It doesn’t taste like it’s from a restaurant”



SMALL WONDERS
Yú Cuisine’s Lobster Har Gao and Queen Shumai, a combination of pork and prawn.

The creator of this delectable bijou dish is Hong Kong-born Chiu Ka-wai, who was Master Chef at the Singapore Regent hotel’s acclaimed Summer Palace Cantonese restaurant for more than 20 years, and who now works his culinary magic at Yú Cuisine.

“Our cuisine is all Cantonese and Chinese, but we want to show that there’s more to dim sum than the normal char siew or har gow,” says Chiu, whose creations include Queen Shumai, a combination of juicy pork and fresh prawn with the tail of the prawn left intact, and the signature Dinosaur Rice Roll, a rice-noodle roll with a crispy tempura-style batter and moist turnip filling. “When we’re overseas and see certain dishes or trends, the inspiration will strike and we’ll find ways to modify the dishes. It’s all about creativity.”

Also pushing the health benefits of sensibly sized meals

is Mediterranean-style vegetarian restaurant Pita Pan, the brainchild of celebrated Israeli-Indian restaurateur Reena Pushkarna. With its scenic view of Marina Bay, the open-plan eatery is increasingly popular for its signature Pita Pockets of crispy chickpea falafel balls wrapped in freshly baked regular or wholemeal pita bread, with optional za’atar or sumac seasoning, and topped with one or more salads and sauces.

BEST BITES
Pita Pan’s Mediterranean Platter. Inset: the salad bar offers 25 ingredients.



Pita Pan’s light, flavourful “pocket meals” are easy grab-and-go options, says Reena’s son, Kunal Pushkarna, who runs the day-to-day operation of the eatery and oversees the kitchen. “Everyone who eats here says that the food has a home-cooked taste to it,” he says. “It doesn’t taste like it’s from a restaurant.”

Such dishes include Red Shakshuka (two eggs poached in a ragout of spicy tomatoes, onions and sweet pepper sauce, and served with a pita pocket); a Mediterranean Platter of hummus, falafel, baba ghanoush, dolma leaves, Jerusalem salad, olives and chillies, with two pita pockets; and Sabich (pita bread stuffed with aubergine, boiled eggs, hummus, tahini and Jerusalem salad topped with a mango sauce). The salad bar offers 25 ingredients including hand-picked local vegetables, home-preserved sundried tomatoes, home-grown olives and pickled vegetables.



SAVOUR *dine*



LEAN CUISINE
Pita Pocket (above left) and Red Shakshuka from Pita Pan. Opposite: Caffé B's Fisherman Platter and (inset) Cassis-Tini cocktail.

Spearheading the menu's direction, Reena is known for her pioneering introduction of Indian food to Israel in the 1980s, though her culinary influences are many. Reena's husband was a captain in the Indian Merchant Navy, and nine years of maritime sojourns brought her into contact with chefs from various parts and ports of the world, whose recipes she learned. The Pita Pan menu is the product of many food tastings undertaken by the Pushkarna family, and regional authenticity is an essential ingredient.

"It's important to us that what we make is the real thing," say Kunal. "We import our spices from the Middle East, like sumac and za'atar, as well as ingredients like mint leaves and tahini [sesame seed] paste. But our pickles and sauces are prepared fresh and in-house."

What's more, the menu is updated regularly. "We wanted to do something for the locals," Kunal says. "People here are fond of sesame as used in Chinese food, and they love spicy food as well. So recently we have

the new *somsoon* – or sesame – falafel and the spicy picante falafel."

Pairing drinks with compact meals can present a challenge, and while fine-dining restaurant Caffé B successfully marries Italian cuisine with Japanese elements, its alfresco bar does the same with bar snacks and Japanese cocktails. "There must be a balance between the food and the drink," says resident mixologist Michael Kumar. "I have to make sure the flavours of both food and drink don't override each other. The quantity of food is also important. And a drink that's voluminous tends to be too heavy for the whole meal."

Among Caffé B's bar bites the Fisherman Platter – with its smoky salmon, aromatic seasoning and satisfying tartness of gherkins, pickles, green olives and capers topped with a drizzle of olive oil – could easily overwhelm most drinks. Kumar pairs this with the Japanese Cassis-Tini cocktail, which employs Japanese cassis, dry

Picture credits: Caffé B; Pita Pan; Yú Cuisine



vermouth and Suntory Japanese whisky served double-strained and chilled. The creative tippie, Kumar says, nicely compliments the dish and balances the palate.

With the recent addition of a new head chef at Caffé B, and the anticipated arrival in the kitchen of a culinary wizard from Italy, the bar plans to add new dishes to the menu, and Kumar will soon be updating his pairings. Like him, perhaps it's also time to revise our thinking, and accept that sometimes less really can mean more. **S**

Fine-dining restaurant Caffé B successfully marries Italian cuisine with Japanese elements, its alfresco bar does the same with bar snacks and Japanese cocktails

WHERE TO DINE



CAFFÉ B

Bar: Bay Level, L1-83
Restaurant: Galleria Level, B1-15
The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands
Tel (65) 6222 2329 (bar);
(65) 6887 3311 (restaurant)



PITA PAN

Bay Level, L1-87
The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands
Tel (65) 6688 7450



YÚ CUISINE

Galleria Level, B1-08
Bay Level, L1-82
The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands
Tel (65) 6688 7318