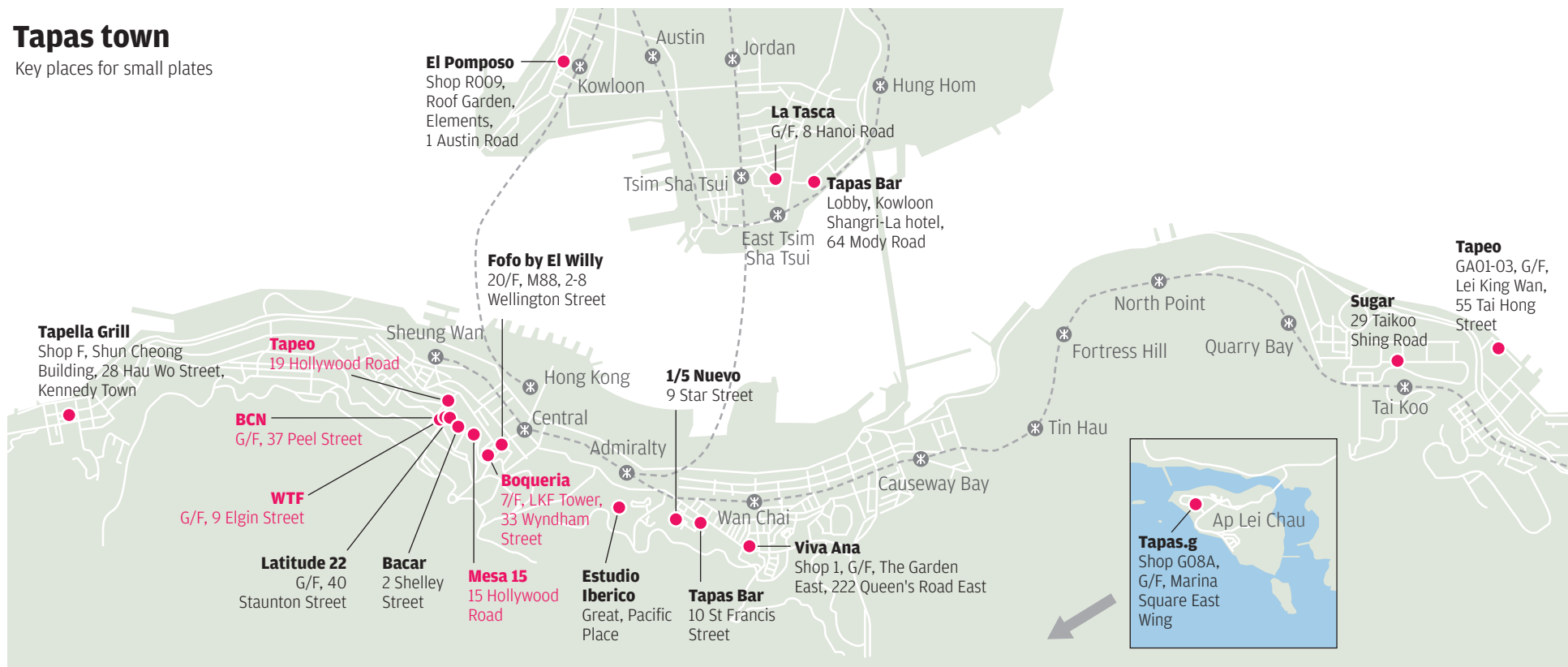


Tapas town

Key places for small plates



evening of paella, snacks and sangria on September 19.

BCN
This features intimate bar seating that provides direct interaction with Spanish chef Edgar Barahona, who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the cuisine and Michelin restaurant experience. It also gives a modern take on tapas that attracts a Spanish-speaking clientele. So it is little wonder that BCN (BarCeloNa) is fully booked for dinner for the next two months, although single diners and couples may get a seat.

Thankfully, lunch is still an option, and a good one as it allows diners to inexpensively sample many of the dishes served in the evening (tasting menus only).

Included in the five courses at lunch is a changing selection of three tapas, such as the *montadito*, a piece of toasted bread that can have different toppings. One BCN version has a base of house-made onion compote, topped with a sliver of Iberico ham and a cube of foie gras with a caramelised sugar topping.

Also excellent is the *pulpo a la Gallega*, slow-cooked octopus infused with paprika served on potato, and a classic salted cod croquette. A must-try is the Andalusian gazpacho that is stunning in appearance and taste.

A new tapas trio is about to hit the menu: gilda – green pepper, garlic, olives, anchovy; octopus, potato, and garlic sauce; and Iberico ham croquette.

BCN has a good selection of Spanish wine and sherry.

WTF
The first thing to note is that WTF stands for wine, tapas, fun. The second is that the place feels more like a late-night bar than a restaurant, and is open until 2am.

The wide menu selection includes *huevos revueltos* WTF. This dish of scrambled eggs has prawns, Iberico ham, mushroom and

asparagus, with a variety of tastes and textures that should appeal to those with the late-night munchies.

For vegetarians, there are the *champinones al Jerez* (mushrooms in a sherry sauce) with four varieties of sautéed mushrooms (portobello, button, shiitake and oyster) given a flavour lift by the sherry, with red and green pepper for colour and textural contrast.

Other options include *patatas bravas*, grilled sardines and a variety of *albondigas* (meatballs). There is also paella for those with larger appetites. The wine list is disappointing due to its lack of Spanish options, but there is a variety of sangria by the glass or jug.

Tapas are something to have with drinks at a bar before going for dinner with friends. The emphasis is on socialising and drinking

LLUIS TARRIDA, COMILONAS PRIVATE KITCHEN

Mesa 15
This is a good option for contemporary Spanish cuisine, including tapas. Noted chef Alejandro Sanchez, who has a Michelin background, is now cooking in the restaurant full time.

The selection ranges from the traditional to Sanchez's modern interpretation of tapas. On the traditional side are Iberico ham croquettes, crispy, pillow-like parcels containing a finely-tuned balance of salty ham and creamy cheese sauce. The thoroughly modern Spanish 'nigiri', with fresh sea urchin and tempura *botan ebi* (sweet prawns), served with a piquant potato salad, messes with

one's expectations of tapas but the flavours come together nicely.

A new addition to the menu is the Mediterranean mussels, paprika, fresh tomato sauce and béchamel. The out-of-shell mussels are meltingly tender, and paprika provides a bite that is balanced by the sweet tomato sauce and slow-cooked onion. The white sauce adds a creamy element.

It is so good that bread or a spoon to finish the sauce is a must.

On the beverage side, a Spanish-only wine list includes wines by the glass, and sangria.

Tapeo
This restaurant, with its bar seating, has been focusing on traditional tapas for almost six years. It has a large à la carte menu that is supplemented by six or seven weekly specials, such as foie gras terrine with sherry jelly. A good start is the pan con tomate (bread with tomato), an old-school dish given a Tapeo touch by blending peeled tomatoes with garlic and salt, spreading them on toasted crusty bread with olive oil and a touch of sweet paprika.

Big on flavour, hand-filleted anchovies make a good accompaniment to the classics, marinated in a mixture of vinegar, olive oil, garlic and thyme. Tortilla, a potato, egg and onion omelette, is a staple tapas dish.

Tortillas are often served as slices, but individual ones are cooked to order here for a fresh taste. For a bit of kick, there is the *gambas pil pil*, shell-off prawns sautéed with garlic slivers, smoky spicy paprika, and a touch of cayenne and coriander.

There is lamb with tomato and spices. The tender lamb is redolent of cumin and star anise, and is served with a zesty parsley sauce. There is a good selection of Spanish wine and sherry, with a recently expanded by-the-glass and half-bottle selection.

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1) Hand-filleted white anchovies; 2) Slow-cooked crispy suckling pig from Mesa 15; 3) Salt cod and potato fritters from WTF; 4) Foie gras from BCN; 5) Lamb skewers with parsley sauce from Tapeo; 6) Patatas bravas from Boqueria. Photos: Ricky Chung, May Tse, Edward Wong, K.Y. Cheng