

PRIVATELY YOURS

As Macau's gaming and hospitality industries continue to climb up the quality ladder, *The Peak* selects some of the best private dining rooms for those who want to impress or be impressed.

STORY VICKI WILLIAMS AND REX AGUADO

(From left) Pork dumplings in vinegar and chili sauce, steamed Kagani crabmeat dumpling, and steamed pork dumpling with baby abalone – a trio of treats from Jade Dragon at City of Dreams.

COURTESY GRAND LISBOA HOTEL / CITY OF DREAMS MACAU / WYNN MACAU / GALAXY MACAU

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Taking its cue from Las Vegas, Macau has been rolling out an array of top restaurants and celebrity chefs to complement its traditional glitz and gambling options. Hong Kong's sister special administrative region has Michelin-rated restaurants that are in high demand, in some cases requiring reservations months in advance.

The reviews have been positive, a testament to the quality of its most creative chefs, both established and emerging, either from the region or farther afield. Even noted chefs from Hong Kong are dipping their ladles into the Macau brew as the gambling mecca slowly morphs into a culinary capital.

FRENCH DREAMS

First stop is the City of Dreams Macau, where the Michelin one-starred The Tasting Room is serving up exquisite French cuisine. The interior and the menu are both contemporary, and under the lead of executive chef Guillaume Galliot, dishes resemble works of art.

Private dining is in the Champagne room, with its four-metre tall doors, huge Carrera marble table, a Champagne cellar and a panoramic view of Cotai. "For something bespoke, I would recommend the Chef's Menu – an eight-course menu that is uniquely created around the best seasonal ingredients of the day," says Galliot. "I can also create degustation menus around guest-chosen wines."

Other tasting-menu options include roasted pigeon served with celeriac risotto, Parisian truffle cream and parmesan emulsion or slow-cooked turbot with zucchini mash and corn, and Culatello ham in



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"FINE DINING IN A PREMIUM AMBIENCE WITH EXCEPTIONAL PRIVACY AND SERVICE STANDARDS ARE WHAT VIP DINERS LOOK FOR"

— Chef Tam Kwok-fung, Jade Dragon

Comté cheese emulsion. Menus are seasonal and dishes may even change throughout the season.

The restaurant also hosts wine dinners with high-profile châteaux, and its cellar of premier and Grand Cru wines includes rare offerings from Penfolds Grange (from 1986) and Château Mouton Rothschild (from 1945).

DRAGON'S FEAST

Still in the City of Dreams, the Michelin one-starred Jade Dragon is an expansive Cantonese restaurant divided into five zones of dramatic interiors. Gourmands can opt for one of the 11 private dining rooms with a direct view of the open kitchen, to see chef Tam Kwok-fung and his team in action. Tam has over 30 years of experience and a sterling kitchen pedigree, having cooked for VVIPs, including Thai, Japanese and Nepali royalty.

"We focus on exquisite, authentic Cantonese cuisine created with seasonal ingredients that is presented in a modern yet exquisite way. From the

techniques to the ingredients, from the plate to the service – everything is of the highest quality," Tam says.

Signature dishes include Jade Dragon prime-cut barbecue Ibérico pork, roasted Boston lobster with crystal noodles and coriander served in a clay pot, and Chinese almond crème brûlée with bird's nest and honey. "Fine dining in a premium ambience with exceptional privacy and service standards are what VIP diners look for," says Tam, citing the private lifts that whisk privacy-conscious guests directly from the car park to the restaurant's VIP rooms.

ITALIAN AFFAIR

For Hong Kong denizens who crave for something familiar in Macau, there's the newly opened 8½ Otto e Mezzo Bombana in the very royal-red heart of Galaxy Macau's second phase. Those who favour Italian cuisine raised to an art form will be relieved to hear that Hong Kong chef Umberto Bombana has brought

01 Guillaume Galliot, executive chef at The Tasting Room

02 The Tasting Room's private Champagne dining room

03 Crab salad with tomato water jelly, avocado mousse and Bloody Mary sorbet from The Tasting Room

04 Chef Tam Kwok-fung of Jade Dragon

05 One of the private dining rooms at Jade Dragon



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06 Chef Umberto Bombana

07 One of the two private dining rooms at 8½ Otto e Mezzo Bombana at Galaxy Macau

08 Bombana's warm lobster salad, roast porcini mushroom and Alba white truffle

his Michelin three-starred magic to Macau, in a dining space inspired by the purity of Murano glass and the luminosity of Baroque mosaic.

Macau's Bombana, led by executive chef Antimo Maria Merone, has two private dining rooms, both simply appointed but perfect for a business lunch or a hearty meal with family or friends. One of the strengths of Bombana is its well-curated wine list that complements its indulgent take on Italian cuisine: tuna with tomato emulsion and Calvisius caviar, Neapolitan ragu pappardelle (created exclusively for the Macau branch) and its irresistible tiramisu. It won't be a surprise if Bombana in Macau gets its own star soon.

While the first phase of Galaxy Macau is known for its high-and-low mix of food outlets, it has also come up with gems such as Belon, a seafood restaurant inspired by the premium oysters from Brittany. But the entry of the decidedly posh Ritz-Carlton Macau in the resort's new wing (along with JW Marriott Macau) means that Galaxy has just upped the ante, especially with the splendid culinary treasure cave that is Lai Heen.

RITZ REWARDS

Lai Heen's claim to fame is that it is "the highest Chinese restaurant in Macau" (it is on the 51st floor of The Ritz-Carlton), but it can also lay claim to serving one of the best *haute* Cantonese *cuisine* in Macau. As with Hong Kong import Umberto Bombana, Galaxy Macau has brought in chef Bill Fu of the Michelin two-starred Tin Lung Heen at The Ritz-Carlton, Hong Kong to lead Lai Heen.

The result is an array of epicurean exotica: char-grilled barbecued Ibérico pork, baked abalone puffs with roasted goose, steamed crab claw with egg white in lobster bisque, and the chef's special braised pork belly with preserved vegetables. Lai Heen even has



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EVEN NOTED CHEFS FROM HONG KONG ARE DIPPING THEIR LADLES INTO THE MACAU BREW AS THE GAMBLING MECCA SLOWLY MORPHS INTO A CULINARY CAPITAL

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an in-house tea sommelier, complementing wine sommelier Jus Wong, who looks after a wine cellar heavy on Bordeaux and Portuguese labels.

Chef Fu can adapt all these a la carte items to suit a big party in any of Lai Heen's five private dining rooms. Taking their cue from the main hall, these gastronomic mini-temples are sensually enriched by textured walls of Azulejo ceramic tile work, filigreed ceilings and exotic finishes, from buttery leather and padded silk to ceramic vase chandeliers – drawing from Macau's Chinese and Portuguese heritage. Check out the 20-seat Lapis Lazuli Room with its corner cathedral windows capturing the pulsing energy of this city on the go – and on the make.

YOUR OWN DÔME

Robuchon au Dôme is probably the most coveted booking in town. The waiting period for a weekend table at the Michelin three-starred Macau outpost of the Joël Robuchon culinary empire is said to be three months. Inside, a cascading 15.5-metre Swarovski crystal chandelier hovers above a Steinway grand piano, all lit by Lalique and Baccarat lamps.

For the ultimate dinner experience, chef de cuisine Francky Semblat suggests the 15-course



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degustation menu, which can be tailored to suit guest requests. Premium ingredients such as caviar, foie gras, langoustine, abalone and Ibérico pork are featured in inventive Robuchon-style dishes.

"One of the most favoured signature dishes is *La Pièce de Bœuf Kagoshima* – pan-seared Kagoshima beef served with green asparagus stuffed with black truffles, and soufflé potatoes," Semblat says. "Our

09 Baked crispy fried rice with seafood in baby pumpkin from Lai Heen

10 Lai Heen's Lapis Lazuli Room boasts rich interiors and stunning views from the 51st floor of The Ritz-Carlton Macau



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INSIDE [ROBUCHON AU DÔME], A CASCADING 15.5-METRE SWAROVSKI CRYSTAL CHANDELIER HOVERS ABOVE A STEINWAY GRAND PIANO, ALL LIT BY LALIQUE AND BACCARAT LAMPS



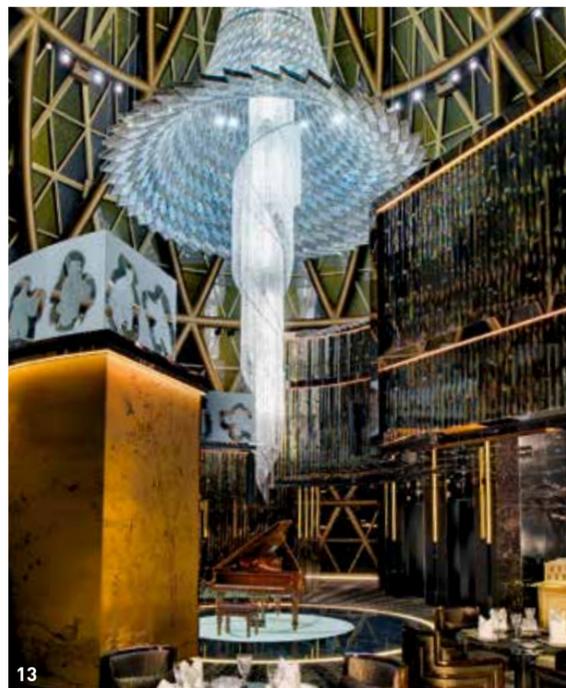
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private rooms offer a high level of privacy, with a dedicated staff member.”

Semblat also cites caviar jelly with cauliflower cream, caviar in fine coral infusion with cream of peas, and a crunchy cone with a centre of avocado salsa and lime zest. Dôme has an award-winning fine wine list, with over 15,600 labels, including wines from eight of the most famous châteaux. Among the rarest is a Château d’Yquem 1847, priced at 800,000 Macau patacas (about HK\$750,000).

WYNN’S CIRCLE

Over at Wynn Macau, the Michelin-starred Wing Lei has come out of its cocoon after a refurbishment



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11 Chef Francky Semblat’s dishes make Robuchon au Dôme the most coveted booking in town.

12 Robuchon au Dôme executive chef Francky Semblat

13 A Swarovski chandelier greets guests at Robuchon au Dôme

14 Wynn Macau

15 Chef Chan Tak-kwong of Wing Lei at Wynn Macau

16 Steamed codfish roll with preserved tree seeds at Wing Lei

earlier this year. Inspired by the colour palette of Vincent Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers*, the restaurant is now bathed in a vibrant mix of yellows with touches of flame coral amid glowing, creamy textures – perfect for highlighting Wing Lei’s fabled Swarovski crystal dragon that greets guests from its wall-length perch.

But the real stars here are executive chef Chan Tak-kwong and his team, who continue to come up with innovative dishes that give classic Cantonese cuisine a fresh, mouth-watering spin, particularly for their delicate, Japanese-influenced plating. The tea-smoked crispy chicken is a must – marinated and smoked with Iron Buddha tea and secret sauces, before being dried for six hours and deep-fried until the skin is golden brown. Chan is also known for his smoked bean curd sheet with mushrooms and sweetened carrot, steamed codfish roll with preserved tree seeds and baked barbecued pork buns with sweetened crust.

All these, and countless other treats, can be customised and served at any of Wing Lei’s five private dining rooms, which can accommodate five to 10 people each. All private rooms have floor-to-ceiling windows with views of the garden and Nam Van Lake. Dedicated service staff members are on hand, along with the resident sommelier. ☎

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