

SOLO flight

Chefs have always ventured from home to gain new inspiration in the kitchens of luxury hotels and restaurants around the world. **Nicole Chabot** talks to some who've gone on their own and prospered



Most of them exercise their know-how from behind the scenes, yet top chefs like other industry captains are pioneers. In the case of chefs, they are avid geographers with an understanding and love of the land and waters, brim with a sense of adventure and passion for feeding people with food that is first and foremost, appealing to both palate and eye.

Previously, there was less opportunity for exploration beyond their homelands, yet today, more top chefs are packing up their toques and whites to travel the world, uncovering novel tastes and fresh inspiration to create new dishes along the way. The beaten path of joining luxury hotel chains to gain a foothold in a foreign land is the easiest route. Yet, once these kitchen artists gather enough experience, many venture out of the five-star comfort zone, opening their own restaurants and going it alone.

Amid globalisation and the emergence of world cities, there is now great enthusiasm for non-native types of food. The well-travelled citizens of Asia-Pacific are

all too happy to be guided back to memories of elsewhere – via their knives and forks.

HONGKONG Parisian élan

One such guide is Patrick Goubier, who transports guests to his native France at his Hongkong-based restaurant. Goubier hails from a small village near Lyon “where people are very serious about their food”. Work has taken him across France (Lyon, Macon, Provence) to London, Barbuda in the Caribbean, Rome and Vietnam where he met his wife, Chef Patrick’s pastry chef.

Goubier got his first taste of the culinary scene of Hongkong in 2002 at Chez Moi. In 2006, he opened Chez Patrick Peel Street. (He received membership to Les Toques Blanches du Monde diploma in 2005). “It was always our intention to offer a homely experience. We wanted to create the atmosphere of a typical Parisian apartment,” he says of the Peel Street eatery.

Against this backdrop of Parisian élan, guests enjoy signature dishes: Foie Gras Terrine Marinated with Pineau des Charentes Stuffed with Semi-Dried Figs, Mini Venison

Pave, Black Truffle Foie Gras Candy, Sweet and Sour Red Fruits Sauce, and Caramelised Floating Island on a bed of rum and vanilla sauce. Corkage is HK\$250 (US\$32) per 75cl bottle though many of his upscale guests don’t mind buying directly from the restaurant.

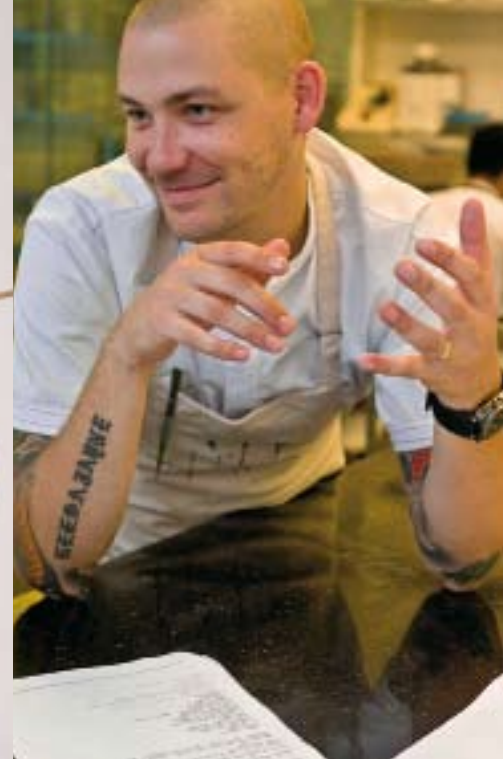
PRICE: Two-course lunch is from HK\$149 (US\$19) per person and three-course dinner is from HK\$499 (US\$64) per person.

CONTACT: G/F 26 Peel Street, Central, Wanchai, Hongkong, tel 852 2541 1401, www.chezpatrick.hk. Open daily from 12pm to 3pm and from 7pm to 11pm. Closed on Sunday.

HANOI His life story

Another Frenchman serving his native food away from home is Didier Corlou. A native of Brittany, Corlou is no armchair traveller. From the age of 17, he spent three years at inns and restaurants across France before exploring Africa, Polynesia, the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia, “cooking for presidents in Africa, showbiz stars in Bora Bora, royalty in Malaysia, the king of Cambodia”.

Above: Chef Didier Corlou of La Verticale in Hanoi and one of his creations. Opposite page: Chef Patrick Goubier of Chez Patrick Peel Street in Hongkong and Foie Gras Terrine



and he also worked with Marco Pierre White and at Claridges in London with two-Michelin-starred chef Emmanuel Renaut, whom he followed to France).

It was in Melbourne that Clift crossed paths with Matthew Bax, then head bartender of Der Raum. "After playing around with food and cocktail pairings, an opportunity arose in Singapore to open up a joint venture: the Tippling Club". The roomy restaurant set in a former army barracks close to the Botanical Gardens has already been deemed 15th best bar in Asia-Pacific by *Bartender* magazine.

"Everything we do is unique and against the grain of your stock restaurant," says Clift, who describes his food as "avant-garde, modern European". "Every single dish is matched to a cocktail and it takes up to six months to create some of the dishes and drinks," he adds. Notables include Teacher's Tipple, a hip flask of four mouthfuls of whiskey that is served in a book, and Butternut



Pumpkin Soup, "a dish you eat from the bowl in". Despite, all the apparent humour, the restaurant operates a strict no-food-and-drink photography policy.

PRICE: A "3-plate" meal starts from S\$70 (US\$49) per person. Other options include five courses at S\$125 (US\$89) for food and S\$220 (US\$156) with cocktails, and 10 courses at S\$230 (US\$163) and S\$330 (US\$235) with cocktails.

CONTACT: 8D Dempsey Road, Singapore 249672, tel 65 6475

2217, www.tipplingclub.com. Open from Tuesday to Saturday, 12pm to 3pm and 6pm to 10.30pm; brunch on the last Sunday of the month, 12pm to 3pm. Closed on Monday.

MACAU
Genuinely Portuguese

Some 6,000 miles away in Macau, a comparably laid-back atmosphere is felt at Restaurant Antonio, the eponymous eatery of Portuguese chef Antonio Coelho, who hails from a small town in north-central

Above: Chef Antonio keeping busy



At his restaurant La Verticale in Hanoi, located in a former mandarin's villa dating from the 1930s, Corlou serves French-Vietnamese fusion. The restaurant and the food is autobiographical. Corlou and his wife's lives are further glimpsed from the framed white-and-black photographs that depict six generations of family on both sides. Dishes include Crab Cannelloni with Sea Urchin Nectar, Rock Lobster in Fish Bladder and Pork Nougat with Caramel. Guests go as much for the historical setting as they do the food. Corlou is a Maître Cuisinier de France, a member of Culinary Academy France and the recipient of a Five Star Diamond Award from the American Academy of Hospitality Sciences.

PRICE: A three-course dinner starts from €45 (US\$66) per person.

CONTACT: 19 Ngo Van So Street, Hanoi, tel 84 4 3944 6317, www.verticale-hanoi.com. Open daily from 11am to 2pm and from 6pm to 10pm. Closed on Monday and Sunday.

SINGAPORE
Perfect pairings

Ryan Clift is not French. He is English with an Australian drawl picked up from a decade in Melbourne, where he worked as Chef de Cuisine at the celebrated Vue de Monde restaurant (the only Three Hat restaurant in Australia,

From top: Chef Ryan Clift of Tippling Club in Singapore; one of his dishes, pork belly with scallops; and Chef Antonio Coelho of Restaurant Antonio in Macau

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Above: Chef John Torode of Smiths of Smithfield in London and a sizzling pan. Opposite page: Chef Jean Beddington of Beddington's in Amsterdam

Portugal "close to the highest mountain in a place known for its good wine, cheese and young goat".

The diminutive restaurant, which seats 24 on the ground floor and 12 on the air-conditioned terrace, is situated in an old Taipa village close to a Buddhist temple. "Genuine Portuguese food and nice hospitality. We try to receive well," Coelho says of his restaurant where "everything is Portuguese, from the wood and ceramics to the wine, water and beer". He serves Roasted Homemade Portuguese Sausage, Gratinated Goat's Cheese with Olive Oil and Honey Served on Toast, Lettuce and Balsamic Vinegar, and African Chicken with garlic, onions, chilli, ginger and coconut milk sauce to his clientele.

Coelho's style has evolved

through experience at top hotels and restaurants in Portugal, Africa, Hongkong and Macau. He is a Master Chef of the Chaine des Rottisseur and member of the Portuguese Managers Association in Macau.

PRICE: A three-course meal starts from MOP\$300 (US\$38) per person without wine.

CONTACT: Rua dos Negociantes No. 3, Old Taipa Village, Taipa, tel 853 289 9998, www.antonimacau.com. Open from Monday to Friday, 12pm to 3pm and 6pm to 12am; Saturday, Sunday and public holiday from 12pm to 12am.

LONDON
Basic English grub

So long has John Torode been in the UK and so omnipresent has he been on British TV

(co-presenting *Masterchef Goes Large* and *Celebrity Masterchef* among other appearances) that it's easy to forget that he is, in fact, an Aussie and one who has been essential in introducing Australasian food to the UK in the mid-1990s.

He's worked at Pont de La Tour, Quaglino's, Mezzo and the Bluebird. He is also dedicated to sourcing high-quality, rare-breed meat, and to supporting organic food and the farming process. Suitably today, Torode runs Smiths of Smithfield and several other restaurants scattered throughout London's Smithfield market, a four-storey Grade Two-listed building which has a 130-year history of meat trading.

Every floor of the eatery is themed differently. Notable is the



rooftop resto, the sexy masculine vibe of the second floor which looks out over the market, and the slouchy leather armchairs of the ground floor which attract an arty cluster. Food is no nonsense back to the basic English grub with a few nods to the chef's travels: well-aged, rare-breed steaks and grills, salt-cod fritters, Chinese five-spice duck. The busy ground-floor café/bar is famed for its breakfasts, which can be sampled from 7am on weekdays.

PRICE: A three-course meal starts from £30 (US\$47).

CONTACT: 67-77 Charterhouse Street, Smithfield, London, UK, tel 44 871 971 6480, www.smithsofsmithfield.co.uk. Open on weekdays from 7am, Saturday from 10am, Sunday from 9.30am and public holiday weekdays from 9.30am.

AMSTERDAM
A slice of Asia

The whiskey/edible soup bowl and soup dish is one that would likely find a fan in Jean Beddington. "I like cooking food I like. At one point, they called me the godmother of fusion," she says of the food at her eponymous restaurant, which has been influenced by her youth in Derbyshire, UK and her years in Japan and Hongkong. "And everywhere else: Holland, India..."

Beddington's opened in Amsterdam in 1983 and was located in the south of the city for 17 years before it moved to its current site in the city centre. There it appears, Asia has made a particularly vivid impression though Beddington spent only a few years there.

"Asia has affected my cooking tremendously," says Beddington, citing the fresh oyster dish on granite of crushed ice with Japanese ginger as one example from the menu.

Also noteworthy is the display of thousands of different types of plates, a hallmark of Japanese eateries and the minimalist decor, described by the owner as "intimate chic. Clean, low key, mostly black with shades of grey and white, the people provide the colour".

Beddington's first cookbook, *Absolutely Jean Beddington*, was published in Dutch last year with striking photography to recommend it. The author hopes the book will be translated in English at some point.

PRICE: A three-course meal starts from €48 (US\$70) per person. **CONTACT:** Utrechtsedwarsstraat 141, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, tel 31 20 620 7393, www.beddington.nl. Open Tuesday to Sunday from 5.30pm. Closed on Monday and Sunday. ■



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