



CATALUNYA



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The influx of Spanish restaurants reaches new heights.

Text by Debbie See

Serving its own particular brand of traditional-meets-modern Spanish cuisine, *Catalunya* has been making waves on the Singaporean dining scene since it opened last year to rave reviews. So the opening of its sister restaurant in Wan Chai Morison Hill was a much-anticipated affair, with Hong Kong diners – ourselves included – filled with high expectations. We're happy to report that we weren't disappointed. We sipped on cocktails, feasted on tapas and hearty mains, and treated ourselves to dessert in an inviting and comfortable dining room. The *Catalunya* experience certainly ticked all our boxes.

Catalunya's group executive chef Alan Desvigne Tolosa is a protégé of Ferran Adrià, spending a decade working at the legendary el Bulli. His talents must have made him a favourite – Adrià flew in to Hong Kong to help celebrate the opening of *Catalunya*.

The restaurant boasts a huge 8,000 sq ft space, with a 5,000 sq ft dining room and a 3,000 sq ft lounge and bar. Docked out in contemporary and classic furnishings to match the food ethos, the interior is sultry and undeniably sexy, with earthy tones, vibrant reds and traditional mosaics as accents.

"The aim was to create a modern yet comfortable space with Spanish touches," says restaurant manager Pep Miró. "The design is meant to echo the most important parts of Barcelona: La Rambla, the Boulevards, and the trendy tapas bars throughout the city."

Emulate a typical night out in Barcelona, with delicious drinks and tasty tapas in good company and a convivial atmosphere. Start at the enormous bar with a cool cocktail crafted by award-winning mixologist Darío Noceiros, then embark on a gastronomic tour of inventive dishes from Catalonia, the region surrounding Barcelona in northeast Spain.

"Our dishes are inspired by Catalan cuisine, and we use traditional recipes fused with modern techniques," Miró explains. "Because of the influx of people to the region such as the French, Romans and Arabians over a long period of time, Catalan cuisine has evolved to become more sophisticated than typical Spanish cuisine."

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CATALUNYA TOMATO TARTAR

A clever take on beef tartar, *Catalunya*'s tomato version is just as delicious, with the tomatoes miraculously carrying a meaty texture thanks to an intricate preparation process. The tomatoes are peeled, halved and deseeded, then cooked in an oven at three different temperatures before tossing with a classic tartar dressing. Served with crunchy toast and "sak" made from tomato water, the dish sets the tone for the meal.



MEDITERRANEAN RED PRAWNS

Diners choose the cooking style – salted, grilled or steamed – for these succulent prawns flown in from the Mediterranean. We chose grilled. The prawns' deep red colour and large size are spectacular, but it's the taste that wows. Sweet and full of flavour, the meat is juicy and generous, while the head carries plenty of rich and pungent shrimp taste lusted after by gourmands. In Catalonia, these prawns are ferocious and are often eaten fresh off the boat.



ROASTED MEAT CANELON

Typically enjoyed during the feast of St Stephen (Bofeg Day), canelón is made from meat leftover from Christmas Day. It usually consists of pasta wrapped around meat and covered with béchamel sauce. *Catalunya*'s version is a crepe filled with roasted veal cheeks, chicken and capers, topped with parmesan, kasaabai – smoked cheese from the Basque region – and basil oil. The heaviness of the melted cheese is offset by the lighter crepe and well-defined flavour and texture of the veal cheek.



TRADITIONAL SUCKLING PIG

This is one of *Catalunya*'s best-known dishes. Month-old piglets are flown in from Toledo, Spain and cooked at 200°C for 40 minutes before being passed through a pizza oven for an ultimate crisp. The piglets are prepped sous-vide using a plate to cut through the crispy skin and tender meat. The skin is delicate and crunchy, with minimal fat and plenty of soft meat. Each mouthful pairs perfectly with a side of the restaurant's sweet roasted pineapple with spices.



TORRIJA

Despite being near bursting point, we couldn't leave without trying *Catalunya*'s desserts. We opted for torrija, brioche marinated in vanilla, cream and milk, then deep-fried with sugar. Smoked milk ice cream brings a saucy element to the exceptionally sweet, slightly crispy and sticky brioche – a heavenly combination. Tiny slices of orange are a welcome accent, providing yet another dimension of flavour.

BILL

(Dinner for 3)

1. <i>Catalunya</i> tomato tartar	\$100
2. Mediterranean red prawns	\$500
3. Roasted meat canelón	\$110
4. Traditional suckling pig	\$825
5. Torrija	\$70

Total \$1,605

* Prices and menu subject to change without notice.