



# The Sum of Two

Roberta Muir twins

three of Singapore's  
finest restaurants with  
three of Sydney's.

## Visiting Singapore for the first time

recently, I was pleased, but not surprised, by the fabulous array of local food available, so inexpensively, at the many hawker centres and great seafood restaurants scattered throughout the city. What I wasn't expecting was world class fine dining as I've come to expect in my hometown of Sydney. Three superb meals in one week brought back memories of some of my favourite Sydney restaurants.

As soon as I walked into Les Amis I was reminded of Marque, Mark Best's stellar restaurant on Crown Street in Sydney. The minimalist décor of both restaurants tells you that this experience is going to be about the food, and the wine list reassures that you'll be drinking well too. Entering either restaurant is like stepping through a magic portal; the street entrances are discreet, easy to miss, and once inside it's easy to forget the city traffic just metres away.

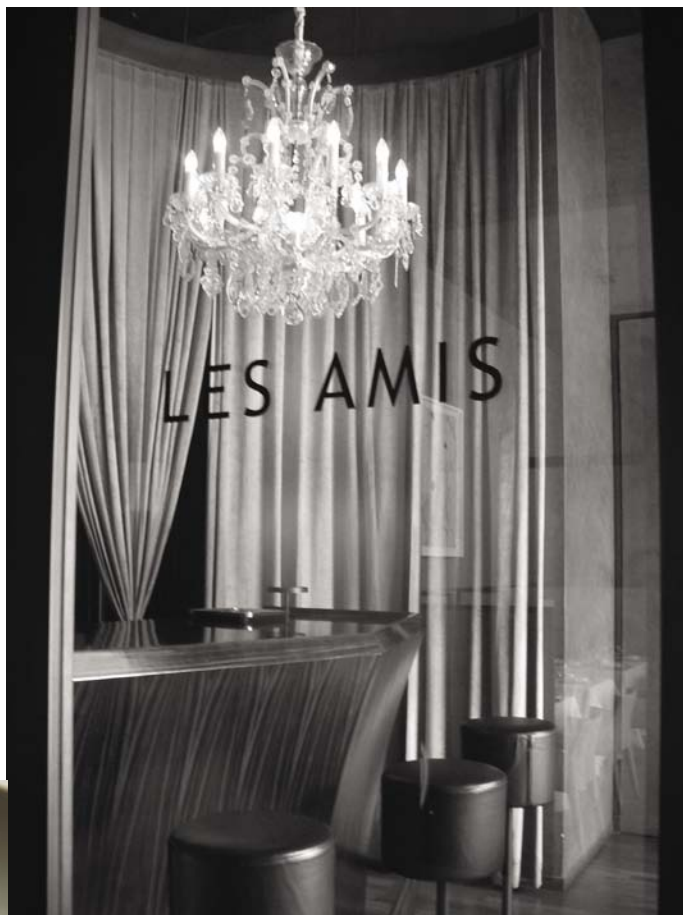
Both Les Amis' tatami-matted, pale green and grey dining room and Marque's softer, chocolate brown space, seat around 50 with a small bar area in the front window. Double-clothed tables, generous linen napkins, and fine silver and glassware, spell understated quality.

Both Best and Les Amis' chef, Gunther Hubrechen, have worked at Alain Pasard's 3 Michelin-star L'Arpege in Paris,



and both do excellent variations on his chaud-froid egg—Best magically matching his with a 10-year-old madeira sercial on his dégustation menu. Both have reinterpreted their classical French training to allow for a light touch where quality produce shines through in every dish, never masked by heavy sauces or unnecessary accompaniments. Both chefs are passionate about their produce, wanting to show it off and educate the diner.

Hubrechen brings live Australian venus clams to the table for inspection, before they're whisked away to the kitchen to be shucked and reappear cooked in their shells on a bed



of salt with strips of grilled tomato on the side, while Best has been known to bring a tub of his sourdough mix to the table, to illustrate to guests the importance of the starter which he has been nurturing for many years. And desserts...ah, desserts. Please don't ask me to choose between Best's dense silken sauternes custard with caramel and Hubrechen's Garigette strawberries with marshmallow slices, and Tahitian bourbon vanilla ice cream.

Sydney probably mastered Italian food long before any other cuisine. In fact, I'm prepared to say that we have some of the best Italian food outside of Italy, which is why it was such a pleasant surprise to stumble across Roberto Galetti's Garibaldi among all the cookshops of Purvis Street. Galetti's passion for his food, his restaurant and his diners instantly reminded me of Armando Percuoco of Buon Ricordo in Sydney's Paddington. Buon Ricordo's dining room in a lovely old terrace house is full of beautiful artwork, sculptures and ceramics and has the warmth and charm of the best southern Italian restaurants. Garibaldi's space is far more contemporary and northern—organza curtains, oversized photos of flowers,





modern Japanese aesthetic with its wide sushi counter-style seating and Claude's refined French air with large gilded mirror and walls adorned with Limoges might seem worlds apart at first. Both restaurants however have small, minimal dining rooms and owners who aim for the seamless merging of east and west in their menus.

Neither Lee Luk nor Chan like the label 'fusion cuisine', and neither mix ingredients for the sake of it. Lee Luk blends the flavours of her Chinese heritage with those of her classical French training not so much in individual dishes, but across her menu—a deep-fried Western Australian marron with a spicy marmak sauce is followed by slices of Aylesbury duck with a sauce made from the carcass passed through an antique duck-press and enriched with a little coffee. Chan works with his chef Dorin Schuster to combine east and west where dishes are open to it, such as a parfait of foie gras with tofu, ponzu sauce and a touch of mirin, but is just as happy to follow with a classic western dish of meltingly tender lamb loin with rosemary jus, artichokes, green beans and caramelised onions. Both Chan and Lee Luk succeed in harmoniously fusing east and west, where so many others have only succeeded in creating

leather chairs and suede banquettes in warm tones spell modern Italian style. Both chefs love nothing more than to have the diner say "I'll leave it to you", and both are bound to include their signature pasta dishes in any menu they prepare.

Percuoco's Fettucine al Tartufo is probably Sydney's best pasta dish—it arrives at the table as a tangle of steaming strands in a cream sauce with a truffle-infused, lightly fried egg on top, the waiter quickly grates on a judicious amount of parmesan before deftly tossing the lot together. Galetti is just as proud of his gnocchi with gorgonzola sauce, walnuts and just a squiggle of reduced balsamico. He experimented with different potatoes and flours for months to come up with the perfect combination. Whether it's Percuoco's zucchini flowers deep-fried in olive oil and sprinkled with sea salt or Galetti's lactic-sweet buffalo milk mozzarella and salty bresaola served with tiny rocket and basil leaves, both chefs bring out the true unadulterated flavours that define Italian cooking, allowing the food on the plate to speak for itself.

Iggy's is one of Singapore's new fine diners, fronted by a man who probably knows as much about fine dining in Singapore as anyone, having been sommelier at the Raffles Hotel before becoming a founding partner of Les Amis. Its small dining room and personalised service immediately reminded me of Claude's, one of Sydney's longest standing fine diners, which opened almost 30 years ago and in late 2004, was sold by Tim Pak Poy to his then sous chef Chui Lee Luk. Iggy's very



## RESTAURANTS

**Les Amis**, #02-16 Shaw Centre, 1 Scotts Rd, tel: 6733-2225

**Marque**, 355 Crown St, Surry Hills, Sydney, tel: +61 2 9332-2225

**Garibaldi**, 36 Purvis St, #01-02, tel: 6837-1468

**Buon Ricordo**, 108 Boundary St, Paddington, Sydney, tel: +61 2 9360-6729

**Iggy's**, 3rd Floor, Regent Singapore Hotel, 1 Cuscaden Road, tel: 6732-2234

**Claude's**, 10 Oxford St, Woollahra, Sydney, tel: +61 2 9331-2325

'con-fusion'. And whether you're making a hole in the top of Iggy's pineapple soufflé to drop a scoop of coconut sorbet in and create your own pina colada soufflé, or opening the top of Claude's bitter orange soufflé so the waiter can pour in the decadent Grand Marnier cream, dessert will certainly be a highlight at either restaurant. **T**

