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ARTY FARE

A night at the museum is no longer just about looking at artworks – you can now dine there too



► Huang Lijie

CHEF Chan Chen Hei, who closed his widely acclaimed Cantonese restaurant in Odette Towers in North Bridge Road in May, had planned to take a break to finish his third cookbook on Chinese culinary history before opening a private-dining eatery.

But the book has to take a back seat now that he is opening a new high-end Cantonese restaurant in the National Museum of Singapore in Stamford Road at the end of the year.

Chef Chan, 53, who heard in July that the museum had a vacant food and beverage (F&B) outlet, decided to view the unit out of curiosity – and fell instantly in love with it.

"It's perfect for the restaurant concept I had in mind, which aims to offer a seamless experience of Chinese culture, from the appreciation of its antiques to food," says the avid antique collector in Mandarin, who will have more than \$1 million worth of his personal collection of Chinese paintings, folding screens and jars displayed in the restaurant.

The restaurant will continue to keep its previous name, Chef Chan's, in English, and Shen Chu San Jue in Mandarin, which means "The Genius Chef's Three Supremes".

The 40-seat restaurant is one of three new F&B eateries to open in museums recently.

The cosy 25-seat Verandah Cafe opened last week at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) in Empress Place, serving sandwiches and pizza.

At the end of this month, 60-seat Lafiandra – a branch of Trattoria Lafiandra in Prinsep Street – will serve its home-style Italian pizzas and pastas in the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) in Bras Basah Road.

While restaurants have opened in museums here since 1996, including Dome Cafe in SAM and Indo-Chine's cafe, bar and restaurant at ACM, more have sprung up in recent times.

In the last year alone, no fewer than four museum eateries have opened – the Mint Cafe at the Mint Museum of Toys in Seah Street, Made In China at the Chinese diaspora museum Hua Song in Pasir Panjang Road, Le Papillon in the Red Dot Design Museum and Novus Restaurant and Bar at the National Museum.

In the pipeline is a Peranakan-themed eatery in the row of shophouses adjacent to the Peranakan Museum in Armenian Street, due to open next year.

F&B options are also being considered for the National Art Gallery in City Hall, slated to open in 2012.



PHOTO: MUSE BAR

MMMMM...: Muse over artworks and martinis at Muse Bar at the National Museum.

Mr Walter Lim, 37, director of corporate communications at the National Heritage Board (NHB), says the push behind introducing F&B outlets in museums is to draw more people through the museums' doors.

"Many Singaporeans love their food and we believe that the presence of exciting F&B outlets will help us attract new museum-goers who will discover that museums are not dull and dusty repositories of artefacts but chic and happening lifestyle destinations," he says.

Art gallery owner Pwee Keng Hock, 43, welcomes this move as eateries can inject more life into museums, making them "happening social venues".

According to Ms Angelita Teo, 35, acting deputy director of operations and business development at

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– Chef-owner Cataldo Lafiandra

the National Museum, its eateries have "definitely contributed to the museum's visitor numbers" although figures are unavailable.

One museum convert is lawyer Natalie Yap, 28, who became aware of the National Museum's collection after having dinner at Novus earlier this year.

On a subsequent visit to the restaurant, she visited the museum's galleries and was so taken by it that she now makes it a point to take her overseas friends there.

NHB's Mr Lim also says that having F&B outlets in museums helps bring in "much needed revenue", although he declines to reveal any figures.

"The funds generated by these commercial outlets help us keep our entrance fees and programming costs affordable for the general public. It also allows us to organise more programmes and exhibitions for the general public," he says.

He is quick to add, however, that these hip bars and F&B outlets do not take the emphasis away from the scholarship and curatorial work that the museum undertakes.

As for restaurants, museums are the new "it" place to open shop in, judging from the competitive tendering process for such outlets.

The National Museum, for example, received no fewer than three offers for each of its F&B units.

"I wanted very much to open a restaurant in SAM because its porticoes evoke a sense of being in Rome or Florence, which is hard to find in Singapore," says Cataldo Lafiandra, 42, the Italian chef-owner of Lafiandra's two outlets.

Mr Yung Ong, 27, director and owner of Novus Restaurant and Bar, adds: "The opportunity to open a restaurant in a space as dramatic and iconic as the National Museum is hard to come by."

For Mr Anderson Ho, 43, chef-owner of Le Papillon in the Red Dot Design Museum in Maxwell Road, the museum's forward-looking industrial design concept was seen as complementing the modern European cuisine he serves.

First-time restaurateurs like Ms Susan Phang and Ms Susanne Tai, both in their early 30s, are all placing their bets on opening Verandah Cafe in ACM.

The former flight attendants say the inspiration for their cafe comes from the European cafes they used to frequent overseas.

"We wanted a place where customers can sit and watch the world go by and the museum's calm, quiet ambience is perfect for this," says Ms Phang.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong-born chef Chan, with his almost 40 years of culinary experience, doesn't plan to disappoint.

With only seven tables available, four of which are in private rooms, he expects his customers to call in advance for reservations so he can tailor the menu to their liking. A six- to seven-course meal for eight in a private room will start from \$500.

"I'm pouring all my heart and soul into this outlet and I'm confident it will take off."



PHOTO: PATELIER DU CHEF

MIX FOOD AND DESIGN: Le Papillon's chef-owner Anderson Ho picked the Red Dot museum as its design concept complemented the eatery's modern European cuisine.

Museum eateries

National Museum of Singapore

93 Stamford Road
Novus Restaurant and Bar
Tel: 6336-8770 Open: 11.30am - 2.30pm and 6.30 - 10.30pm daily; 10.30pm - 2am daily for the bar
Enjoy modern European cuisine by executive chef Dan Masters and executive sous chef Philipp Meisel, both trained in the two Michelin-starred restaurant Le Gavroche in Britain.

Novus Cafe
Tel: 6337-1397 Open: 9am - 9pm daily
Snack on light sandwiches, cakes and pastries.

Muse Bar
Tel: 6337-9000 Open: 6pm - 3am daily except Sundays
This place is known for its mean martinis.

Chef Chan's Restaurant
Opening at the end of the year

Asian Civilisations Museum

1 Empress Place
Bar Opium
Tel: 6339-2876 Open: 5pm - 2am (Sun to Thu), 5pm - 3am (Fri & Sat)
This chill-out lounge is known for its prosecco and vodka offerings.

Siam Roast II
Tel: 6338-7596 Open: 11am - 11pm daily
Enjoy a mix of Cambodian, Vietnamese and Laotian food at this alfresco cafe.

IndoChine Waterfront Restaurant
Tel: 6339-1720 Open: Noon - 3pm (Mon to Fri), 6.30 - 11.30pm (Sun to Thu), 6.30pm - 12.30am (Fri & Sat)
This fine-dining restaurant serves Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian specialities.

Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Road
Dome Cafe
Tel: 6339-0792 Open: 8.30am - 10.30pm (Sun to Thu), 8.30am - 11pm (Fri & Sat)
This casual cafe serves, among other things, pies and sandwiches.

Lafiandra
Opening at the end of the month

Chinatown Heritage Centre

43 Pagoda Street
Singapore Heritage Restaurant
Tel: 6325-2878 Open: 11am - 11pm daily
Find both authentic Singaporean food and Asian fusion dishes here.

Hua Song

262 Pasir Panjang Road, Haw Par Villa
Made In China
Tel: 6339-6833 Open: 11.30am - 3pm and 6 - 11pm daily
Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka and Teochew food is served here.

Red Dot Design Museum

28 Maxwell Road
Le Papillon
Tel: 6327-4177 Open: Noon - 2.30pm (Mon to Fri) and 6.30 - 10.30pm (Mon to Sat)
Enjoy modern European fare at this restaurant.

Bakang Tins
Tel: 6327-4123 Open: 11.30am - 3pm and 5.30 - 10pm daily except Sundays
This Japanese-style Korean restaurant offers the best of both cuisines.

Artery
Tel: 6327-4820 Open: 4pm - 1am (Mon to Thu), 4pm - 3am (Fri), 7pm - 1am (Sat)
Relax at this chill-out bar which serves finger foods.

Skin
Tel: 6327-4638 Open: 5pm - 1am (Mon to Thu), 5pm - 3am (Fri & Sat)
This chill-out bar plays adult jazz.

Boulevard
Tel: 6327-4338 Open: 3pm - midnight (Mon to Thu), 3pm - 1am (Fri)
This bar plays house and easy-listening music.

Mint Museum of Toys

26 Seah Street
Mint Cafe
Tel: 6339-6266 Open: 9.30am - 10.30pm daily
This toy-themed cafe offers both Asian and Western food.

Malay Heritage Centre

73 Sultan Gate
Tepak Sireh Restoran
Tel: 6396-4373 Open: 11.30am - 2.30pm and 6.30 - 9.30pm daily
Housed in a restored bungalow next to the Istana Kampong Glam, which has since been converted into the Malay Heritage Centre, this restaurant serves halal food.