

Mietta

ORITIC

RESTAURANT PATRONS HERE ARE NOTORIOUSLY FICKLE. BUT, JOANNA HUGHES SAYS, SOME RESTAURANTS ARE WORTH THEIR FOLLOWING



IT wasn't the best day to head out for a restaurant review: clouds threatening rain, a crowded work schedule – but despite it all, I was curious to see Angelo Sanelli's new restaurant on Arab Street, Mietta's.

When I began working as a journalist in Singapore a long time ago, I was sent to review Michelangelo's on Jalan Merah Saga, then the hottest new dining venue in town. It was so crowded that night that you could barely slip a credit card between the guests. The restaurant became a "local", the kind of place you needed no excuse to go to, where you felt at home and could meet friends and even have a glass too many, no worries.

Then, earlier this year, Angelo and his business partner split, and Angelo decided to take his talents to Arab Street, where he has opened Mietta's. Mietta's is at the wrong end of Arab Street, opposite the Golden Landmark Hotel, but Angelo was able to knock together three shophouses to get the space he needed.

The space has a low ceiling, with walls in shades of sienna and burnt umber. Because of the rain, there wasn't much light from the street-side windows, so what should have been warm Tuscan tones turned into gloom. On one wall, there's a portrait of Angelo and his wife, done, he says, by an artist in one afternoon, and not really finished.

Which is the feeling I got about Mietta's.

When we walked in, Angelo himself was behind a desk and waved us to a table. A waiter came over, we had a look at the menu, we ordered the vodka penne and the risotto with foie gras and porcini mushrooms as a starter. It was lunchtime; eventually one woman wandered in, waiting for some other friends to arrive.

The vodka penne arrived; while it comes in two versions (one with prawns) I opted for the version with a creamy rose and vodka sauce. It's a dish I've often wanted to make myself, so

MIETTA'S

126 Arab Street
T: 6396 5493
Open: 11 - 2am (M - F)
6 - 10.30pm (M-Sat)
Closed on Sundays



I paid particular attention to it. The penne was a bit underdone – not that I prefer overcooked pasta – but the sauce was tasty enough. My partner's risotto was a bit soupy and very, very redolent of the porcini. The baby lamb shank that followed was a bit gamey, and I wished that I had ordered the well-done Orange. Orange and More Orange for dessert instead of the panna cotta with girotine cherries (note: this is more usually spelled "griottine" or "griotine"), which tasted as if it had been sitting uncovered in the fridge for quite some time.

After we finished eating, Angelo showed us the upstairs lounge, Hugo's, which would be a very good after-work destination, a rarity nowadays when so many places seem determined to blast you out of any good mood you may have come in with. Back at the table, he told us about his niece, his sister, his childhood in Australia. There are diabetic-friendly dishes on the menu and looking at Angelo, you know why.

By this time two expatriate women had come in and settled in for a longish lunch; I hope that the crowd from Holland Village turns up in numbers enough to keep Mietta going. There is enough experience and talent between Angelo and Dennis Sim (who came over from Zambuca) to make a go of this one.



YANTRA

There are a lot of people in Singapore who simply don't believe in paying fine dining prices for Indian food and quite a few who don't think they can experience fine dining in a shopping mall. And that's too bad, because these are the people who will miss out on Yantra.

I wanted to treat some friends from India and decided on Yantra's lunch buffet. Even if the food hadn't been good, the service would have made up for it. Nothing was a problem: when my guests ran late, not a problem; when the young boy in our party overturned his soft drink, clean up was done cheerfully and without any of the "aiyah" mutterings that so often accompany that particular scenario in other Singapore restaurants.

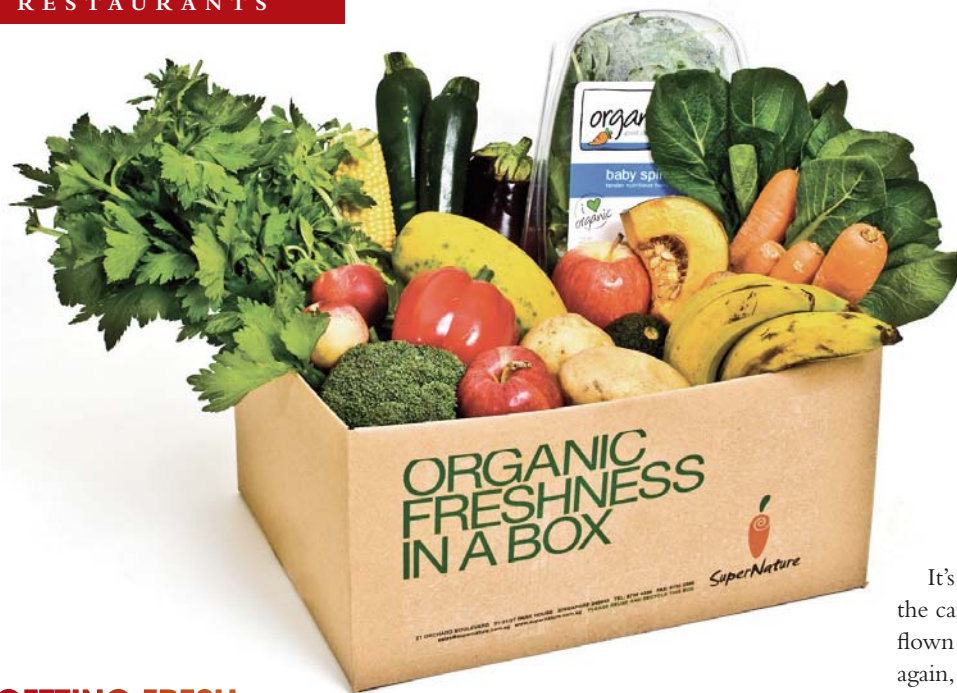
My husband and I returned for an evening out and were just as impressed with the restaurant and its service. You'll want to dress up a bit; it's smart casual with no jeans, shorts or flip-flops allowed, but then again, the décor is chic and you should be too.

The restaurant is modern and smart and if you're expecting peacock feathers, flocked wallpaper and oversized colour photos of Sai Baba, you may think it's a bit cold. Presentation is precise (small portions, artistically arranged) with a wide variety of vegetarian (18) dishes. There's no beef, no pork and no MSG; there's a hefty corkage charge (S\$40) but unless you have a particularly rare vintage you wish to pour, you can do very nicely with the wines on offer. (Next door is the Soma Wine Shop, with 200 varieties priced between S\$50-S\$100.)



YANTRA

163 Tanglin Road
#01-28/33 Tanglin Mall
T: 6836 3088
Open: 12 - 3pm
6.30 - 10pm (M - F)
6.30 - 11pm (Sat - Sun)



GETTING FRESH

It takes a lot to focus on vegetables when planning meals; if you grew up like I did with meat, potato, and one veg as the standard arrangement, it's hard to get beyond green beans or asparagus (fresh) or mushy green peas.

However, the SuperNature Farm Box will force you to reconsider the humble vegetable.

For one thing, the vegetables are all organic – and properly certified, too; they're seasonal; and what comes in the box is often unexpected. Several times I've had to turn to the internet to figure out exactly what that leafy green was and how to cook it.

It's not cheap – and one worries about the carbon footprint of an aubergine flown from New Zealand – but then again, isn't it better to go with quality rather than quantity?

You can now order the farm boxes online at www.supernature.com.sg; you can add in free-range eggs and organic full cream milk if you like. (I once got the old-fashioned bottle with the bulge in the neck for the cream, the sort of thing you'd chase the milk float for, if such a thing still existed.)



CHINA PLATE

The ground floor of the Hermès store at 24 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré features a mosaic which has now inspired the latest range of fine dinnerware from the French luxury brand. Mosaïque au 24 is worked in shades of ochres and greys, highlighted with gold, and encompasses punch bowls, presentation plates, and dinner, lunch and breakfast services.

There is also an Asian-inspired service, originally created for the Mandarin Oriental in Hong Kong. Les Poèmes du Mandarin is adorned with poems handwritten by Chinese artist Fung Ming Chip (the last an unfortunate name in close proximity to porcelain that runs to S\$175 for a dinner plate). Truly lovely and available at Hermès here. ■