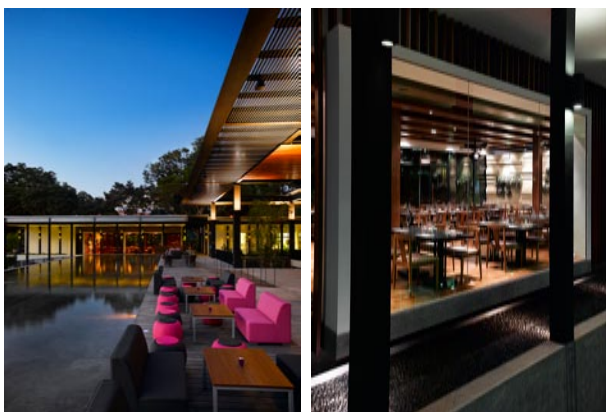


HORSEPLAY

JULIA HAWES TRIES OUT THE NOSEBAG AT HORTPARK



KHA

Type of cuisine Modern Thai

Address 33 Hyderabad Road, #02-02

Contact details 6476 9000

Opening hours Lunch: Tues-Sat, 11.30am-3pm

Dinner: Tues-Sun, 6.30pm-Midnight

Sunday Brunch: 9.30am-3pm

Wine Small, commercial, but very drinkable list with an Antipodean focus, plus a handful of top flight champagnes. Four reds, four whites and four sparkling wines, and two dessert wines by the glass from S\$14. Wine by the bottle from S\$70.

There has been a lot of buzz about Yenn Wong's new venture, Kha, at HortPark in the genteel environs of Alexandra Park. Wong is the creative, young entrepreneur behind Graze at Rochester Park and the collection of JIA boutique hotels. Now she has turned her hand to something that has been astonishingly and conspicuously absent from the Singapore dining scene – a Thai restaurant that blends authentic food with a stylish setting.

Wong has teamed up with Australian consultant chef David Hamilton, who has worked with Banyan Tree and the glorious, excruciatingly expensive Trisara, both in Phuket, as well as Dream Hotel in Bangkok. While Hamilton is not physically on site, he has created a menu that injects modern touches into otherwise traditional Thai dishes: bright, exuberant flavours, with the odd surprise. There is an emphasis on herbs and a measured approach to the use of coconut cream so that even the richer curries are not cloying. But fear not, this isn't a restaurant that flaunts an absentee talent and puts inexperienced staff in the firing line. Thai executive chef Kunchit Srimuang is in charge of the brigade on the ground, and has over 10 years' experience, previously working with Hamilton at both Trisara and Dream Hotel.

Kha is housed in the main building at HortPark, and the approach to the restaurant by way of the open air bar area on decking overlooking a large, tranquility pool and a venerable, gnarled, uplit banyan tree, is both soothing and dramatic. The restaurant's décor echoes the natural theme of its surroundings, hitting the right balance between contemporary casual and relaxed rustic. Natural finishes have been used throughout, down lighting pools light on the tables rather than illuminating the room, tables and chairs are fashioned from unvarnished teak, and there is a profusion of plants and shrubs.

While the food was on the whole a success, one aspect of the Kha experience that needs improvement is the service. While friendly and willing, the staff seemed to be unsure about the dishes they were serving.

The menu is laid out in typical Thai style with appetisers, dips, soups, salads, wok-fried items, curries and desserts. The sections aren't overloaded, which makes it approachable, but one thing that I found surprising is that there isn't a vegetable section, and hardly any vegetarian dishes. We started with shrimp and crab cakes which were crisp outside, packed with seafood and tender within, matched with a tangy green mango salad drizzled with yoghurt and sweet chilli sauce. The addition of yoghurt may be somewhat unorthodox, more akin to Indian cuisine, but it wasn't out of place. Also try the shrimp with whole pepper leaf, dipped in a mild red curry tempura batter, deep fried and served with a sticky, barely sweet tamarind dipping sauce – an excellent combination where taste and texture were built up layer by layer.

Salads were top notch: luscious, rare, grilled salmon (clearly not a staple Thai ingredient) was matched with classic flavours of fresh mint, coriander, chilli, a good squeeze of lime, and twists of crispy salmon skin on the side. A more traditional spicy banana blossom salad was rendered lighter with the use of a dash of coconut milk to bind it rather than the usual sinfully rich coating of coconut cream. The crunch of the raw, shredded banana flower and crushed peanuts contrasted well with the ribbons of succulent young coconut scattered on top.

Main courses were a bit more hit and miss. Like many of you, no doubt, I am a fully paid-up member of the Thai food fan club and I can take my chilli but, good God, steamed sea bass with snake beans and coconut heart in a sour curry broth was straight out of hell's kitchen. And I don't mean worthy of Gordon Ramsay. Bangkok street food is the closest I have come to this scale of stinging heat and the broth was so fiery I couldn't taste the other ingredients. It possibly smacks of tourist tackiness but might it be an idea to give an indication of chilli levels on the menu for the unsuspecting? Green curry with soft shell crab was well executed with the crunchy little crustaceans perched on top of the gravy so they didn't become soggy. The curry was a little sweet for my taste, although that is authentically Thai, but I enjoyed the unusual addition of tongue-tingling Szechuan pepper which creeps up on you at the end of each mouthful. □



CRÈME DE CASSIS

FRENCH FINE DINING JUST GOT FINER AT CASSIS, SAYS *SUNITA SHAHDADPURI*

Things have got a whole lot more interesting at Rochester Park. If the exclusive dining enclave has lost a few patrons to Dempsey Village, four exciting developments collectively known as Rochester Terrace will soon be wooing them back – in droves.

Caprice Holdings, with Ghana born, UK-educated Mahesh Ramnani at the helm, has transformed four majestic black and white bungalows into a quartet of completely different gastronomic concepts. The huge project, including a Russian vodka and caviar bar, wine and tapas bar, patisserie and cooking atelier, as well as Cassis, a French fine dining restaurant, has been set up under the guidance of the Tolaram group, a privately held international conglomerate.

Ramnani has brought with him an international team to run Rochester Terrace; their collective experience spans across England, France, Spain, Italy and the Baltic region. “I believe we have struck the right combination in terms of ambience, atmosphere, food, wine and service so that all senses can be fired together. The venture is bold, adventurous and fitting for the

growing number of sophisticated diners in Singapore...”

After dining at Cassis, I can’t help but agree. The property is stunning, enhanced by the lush greenery and beautiful lighting. It is headed by 33-year-old Michelin starred executive chef Eric Guilbert, who gained his experience at La tour d’Argent in Paris, La Tante Claire and Admiralty in London, Marbella’s Las Dunas and Shanghai’s Hua Ting.

Cassis is the gourmet experience of the entire development; its unique design and layout allows several dining options, depending on your mood. You may dine indoors in elegant surroundings complete with modern, black chandeliers, sunken outdoor seating surrounded by water, alfresco under the stars, or in a more relaxed manner at the outdoor pavilion.

One thing remains constant wherever you are seated though – the delightful food. From the entrees I recommend the homemade duck liver terrine – sinfully divine. Main courses include a duet of scallops, a nicely done red mullet and a seven-hour slow-cooked leg of lamb. The star, however, had to be the dramatically plated grilled beef

tenderloin; a very flavourful and tender cut of meat, surrounded by a moat of creamy celery purée. Desserts are light, delicate and beautifully presented, from parfaits to fruit sorbets.

Run, don’t walk to Cassis. Once you’re there, sit back, savour the surroundings, and enjoy an unhurried meal of perfection. □



CASSIS

7 Rochester Park
Singapore 139217
Tel: +65 6872-9366
Lunch – Daily from 12.00pm to 3.00pm
Dinner – Daily from 7.00pm till 11.00pm
Bar – 6.30pm to 12am