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DINE IN: 5 new alfresco restaurants

Published: 26/08/2009 - Filed under: [News](#) »

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SML, Hongkong

When did it open? August 2009.

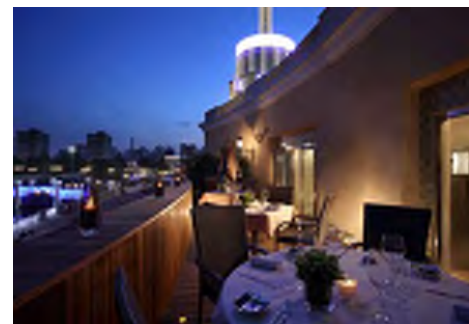
Where is it? On the 11th floor of Times Square in the Causeway Bay shopping and dining district.

Fast facts: The 650sqm restaurant comprises a bar, an open kitchen, a flexible communal dining area and an outdoor terrace, a rare feature in space-tight CWB. The interior is a mix of timber tones, metallic surfaces and mismatched upholstery.



SML, the acronym for Small Medium Large, refers to the portion sizes of everything that's listed on the pan-European menu, catering for the undersized to big eaters.

The drinks list offers 38 wine types, 18 of which are available from an automated wine dispenser. Wine is dispensed directly from the bottle using an Italian patented technology that enables it to be opened and protected from oxidation, and the flavour remains intact for over three weeks.



Invito, Beijing

When did it open? June 2009.

Where is it? Located by the Chaoyang Park Lake at Solana Shopping Center, close to Beijing's CBD.

Fast facts: Designed to look like an Italian villa, Invito (Italian for invitation) comprises a fine-dining

restaurant with a waterfront terrace, a café with outdoor lakeside seating and a lounge bar. Seating capacity is for 220 indoors and 50 on the lakeside terrace during the warm season.

The menu is authentic contemporary Italian, featuring black and white truffles and Wagyu Beef Florentine steak which comes from the Chianina oxen, one of the world's oldest breeds. Also available are daily specials, a three-course business lunch set (US\$24) and a four-course gourmet dinner (US\$56 to US\$144). For drinks, the list has over 280 wine labels handpicked from five continents, including vintage wines served by the glass.

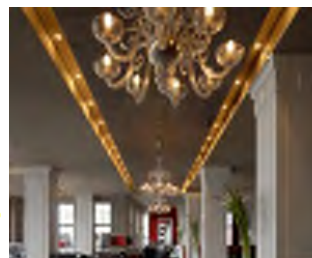
On the ground floor, the café caters for time-strapped executives and shoppers while the lounge entertains with signature cocktails and live music on weekends, including Italian opera performances.

Mr & Mrs Bund, Shanghai

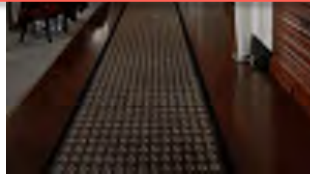
When did it open? April 2009.

Where is it? On the sixth floor of Bund 18 at Shanghai's riverfront party central.

Fast facts: As its name suggests, **Mr & Mrs Bund adds to the already-impressive list of restaurants lining the famous stretch, with the likes of Whampoa Club and M on the Bund.** It occupies the former site of Sens & Bund by



The restaurant's chic layout encourages dining for groups of all sizes, from a large communal table (the dining room's centrepiece) to smaller tables for two to six people to cosy patios overlooking the Bund – definitely the best seats in the house.



Modern French food is prepared by Chef Paul Pairet, most recently from Jade on 36 at the Pudong Shangri-La. Enough said.

The menu is extensive, divided into various sections: appetizer (*Épicerie* or grocery, Raw), vegetable (Salad, Greens & Mushrooms, Potato, Rice/Pasta, Juices & Soups, Bread, Egg), seafood (Shellfish, Fish), meat (Plumes, Beef, Veal, Pork, Lamb) and dessert (Fruit, Ice Cream & Sorbet, Tart & Co., Patisserie, Yogurt and *Entremets*). The wine selection is equally wide.



Zense Gourmet Deck and Lounge Panorama, Bangkok

When did it open? March 2009.

Where is it? On level 17 of Zen World, Bangkok's new entertainment and lifestyle mecca within the mega CentralWorld complex.

Fast facts: This achingly hip restaurant combines fine dining with a view of downtown Bangkok. Food is prepared by chefs from four of Bangkok's top restaurants – White Café (Thai), Gianni Ristorante (Italian), The Kikusui (Japanese) and Red (Indian), plus a selection of premium wines and cocktails. Dinner and drinks are available from 5.30pm to midnight, plus a DJ spinning house music.

Spread over 4,000sqm, the restaurant offers a choice of indoor dining and outdoor in a large terrace (taking up half the space). Total seating capacity is for 400, with room for another 300 people standing. Designed by architect Amata Lhupaiboon (of the Sila Evason Hideaway Koh Samui), Zense is part of Destiny, an F&B project boasting four levels of rooftop restaurants and bars atop Zen World.

El Greco, Hongkong

When did it open? April 2008.

Where is it? Tucked away on the edge of a park in Ap Lei Chau, historically a fishing village in Hongkong.

Fast facts: Framed pictures of Greek historical ruins hang on the walls of El Greco, which literally means "the Greek", and light Mediterranean music is being played on the background. (The namesake also belongs to a Greek-born Spanish Mannerist painter.)

Food is decidedly Greek. Choices include Mediterranean seafood and meat (cooked from an open fire grill), *Tsipura* or grilled sea bream with steamed lemon potatoes and Lamb *Souvlaki*. A wine selection is imported from Greece and France, and non-alcoholic drinks are also available.



Julian Tan