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Bold and beautiful: 5th Quarter at Vagabond Hotel

You can never have too much charcuterie



5th Quarter is located at the new Vagabond Hotel.



Andy Yeo

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Housed unexpectedly on the ground floor of the newly launched Hotel Vagabond on Syed Alwi Road, 5th Quarter is the latest brainchild of Loh Lik Peng, in collaboration with fellow entrepreneur Satinder Garcha. It's also a name with a deeper meaning, illuminating the history of Rome's unique style of cooking, using the fifth quarter of meat or in Latin, *quinto quarto*, which consists of offals and other less-appreciated parts of an animal in a dish.

It's fitting that this aligns with the philosophies of Italian-Australian executive chef, Drew Nocente, who was raised on a farm and taught to "respect the produce as well as use all of it; no part goes to waste." This belief is very much a part of his offerings at 5th Quarter.



The atmosphere in the hotel is designed to transport visitors to a more decadent time.

Ambience

The restaurant sits in the Vagabond Salon, a modern interpretation of a Parisian salon, spanning 5,000 square feet of deep velvet reds and luxurious golds against a backdrop of framed artwork sourced and commissioned by Garcha. The dining area seats up to 70 people, a space (and a cocktail menu) which is shared with the Vagabond Bar, a concept set-up by renowned drinks collective Proof & Company. As the only hotel offering an Artist in Residence program, diners will also have an opportunity to meet and mingle with a rotation resident artists.

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Food

The dinner menu at 5th Quarter is designed to be shared, thematically arranged to reflect the preparation treatments used, from “Salted and Hung” and “Smoked, Brined, Cured” appetisers to “Grilled, Seared, Charred” mains and “Frozen, Churned, Baked” desserts. Chef Drew also serves a condensed version for lunch ensuring some dishes are changed every two weeks in accordance to feedback.



All charcuterie is smoked and cured to perfection in-house.

Starting centrepieces feature a fresh-from-the-oven apple fennel sourdough (S\$6) with a generous portion of smoked honey and onion whipped lardo followed by Chef Drew's selection of charcuterie (S\$22) which will always consist of three types of cured meat, one type of rilette and one type of pâté. On the evening we visited, we sampled the honey truffle lard, red wine salami, dark ham prosciutto, ox-tail rilette and country pâté – all smoked and cured in-house.

The thinly sliced beef tongue (S\$12) sous vide for 16 hours, is plated with fried onion and wasabi, while the pork tail (S\$12), first deboned, sliced and finally deep fried, rests on a bed of confit lemon cream and compressed cucumber. For a seafood alternative, order the Carabinero prawn (S\$25) with chorizo and potato chips, and we guarantee you'll be mopping up the sweet juices with your leftover sourdough. The most addictive on the menu is definitely the deep fried salt and pepper tripe (S\$10) which is crispy on the inside but deliciously tender within.



Sous vide pork collar served cold.

Move onto a heartier selection by trying the “Grilled, Seared, Charred” portion of the menu which includes a cold smoked, sous vide pork collar (S\$32) served with radishes and praline dressed with konbu, soy and squid ink sauce and a smoked, sous vide, pan fried short rib (SG\$36) decorated with a carrot and pomegranate sauce. While both sets of sauces helped cut through the fat, we’d recommend choosing one or the other else be slightly overpowered by the smokiness of the dishes.

Also good to try is the black mash (S\$8), which, while unappealing at first sight, is a wonderfully buttery mashed potato with the squid ink, or the pumpkin (S\$8), sous vide and roasted, with a curious layer of buttermilk ‘skin’ made from over-whipped fermented yoghurt and milk, set with gelatine.



A bite of the smoked pineapple is a nice pick-me-up at the end of the meal.

While you might not have room for dessert, there's a few light options to close off the evening including the cured berries (S\$14), yoghurt foam, and an olive oil gel infused with rosemary, sprinkled with granola bits. The smoked pineapple (S\$14) also helps level set that impending food coma. Don't leave before enjoying the complimentary Anzac cookies with bacon, a little bit of Chef Drew's own childhood Aussie treat (they can be quite addictive, but at least you can also take home a pack of 30 for S\$12!).

Verdict

This latest Unlisted Collection collaboration is bold – both on a culinary and an artistic level. While we wouldn't call this phenomenal just yet, there's something about Chef Drew's philosophy and the underlying meaning behind 5th Quarter that tells us a broader story is soon unfold.

5th Quarter, Vagabond Hotel, 39 Syed Alwi Road, +65 6291 1936, 5thquarter.com.sg