

NEW IN TOWN

The new Culina at COMO Dempsey: Grocery shopping never looked this good

BY AARON DE SILVA | 04 MAY 2019

If you enjoy cooking, eating, entertaining and, well, generally living a life well-lived, then Culina at COMO Dempsey has your name written all over it.



Culina at COMO Dempsey is housed in former army barracks. (Photo: Culina)

Jewel Changi Airport might currently be the island's buzziest dining locale, but over in Dempsey Hill, a quiet storm has been brewing. There was the opening of lifestyle destination JAM at Siri House earlier this year; the introduction of pop-up natural wine bar Drunken Farmer at Open Farm Community; and the relocation of fine dining Chinese restaurant Min Jiang from its former Rochester Park home.

The district's real jewel, though, has to be Culina at COMO Dempsey, which has also relocated from Block 8 to Block 15 to be closer to its COMO cousins, COMO Cuisine, The Dempsey Cookhouse & Bar, Ippoh Tempura Bar, Candlenut and Dover Street Market Singapore (the COMO Group acquired Culina in 2012).

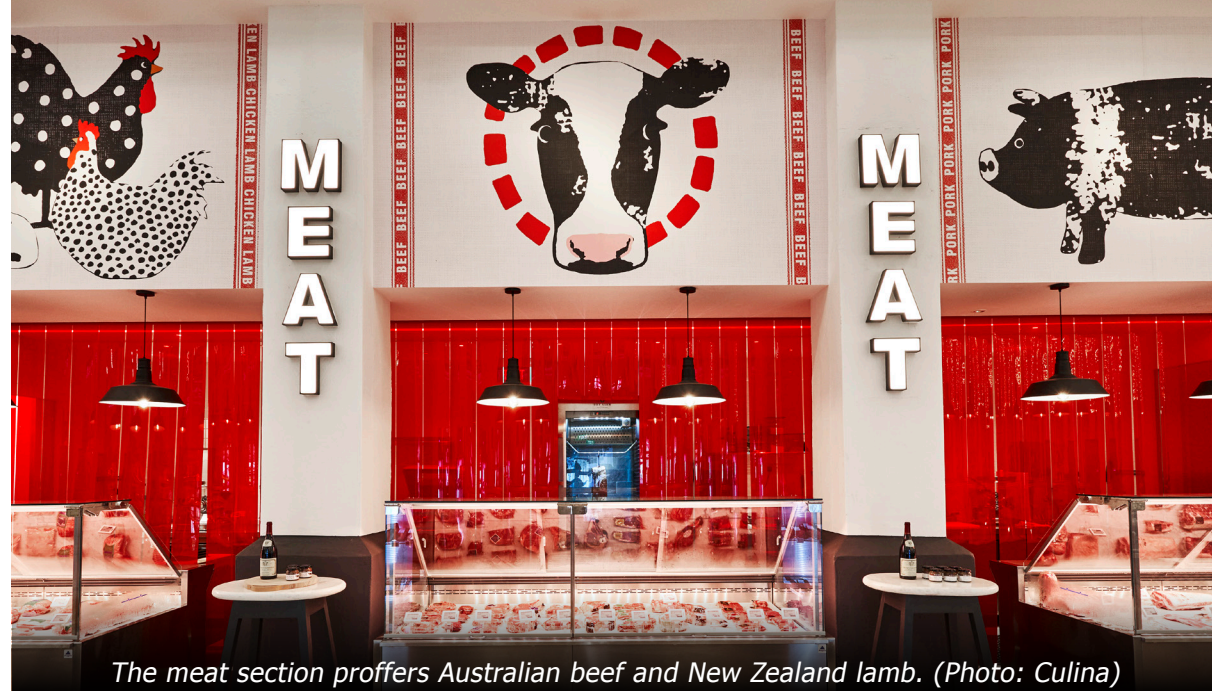


At 15,000 sq. ft., Culina's new home is two-and-a-half times bigger than its old digs, and the bistro now has space for 160 diners. Italian designer Paola Navone has given the cavernous, light-filled interior a casual chic, Parisian bistro vibe. Indeed, on any given day – the gourmet emporium opened the same week Jewel did – you could be forgiven for believing that you have stumbled upon an outpost of Le Bon Marche.

That is to say, Culina makes a worthy rival to the Left Bank institution (or at least, its food hall, La Grande Epicerie). Trawling the aisles of its Marketplace, you spy succulent cuts of beef from longtime suppliers Black Onyx and Westholme, as well as new label Margaret River Fresh Angus Beef. Perhaps you're in the mood for lamb? Well, there's New Zealand favourite Maori Lakes, purveyors of free-range, grass-fed critters.

Over in the seafood section, your gaze falls upon fist-sized oysters from Royal and Perle Blanche ("White Pearl"), air-flown from France. (In a tasting arranged for members of the media, the molluscs proved to be fresh, creamy, plump and not too briny, with the Perle Blanche variety being fleshier and creamier than the Royals).

From the House of Kaviari is a new product: Rope-hung and smoked Norwegian salmon. Smoked with beech wood, the fillets are vertically hung from a rope, a method that yields a tender texture.



The meat section proffers Australian beef and New Zealand lamb. (Photo: Culina)



Fresh French oysters. (Photo: Culina)

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Also new to Culina is a limited edition red prawn elixir from Rosso di Mazara, Message in the Bottle. Contained in what looks like a flask of cognac, the elixir is obtained by freeze-drying the heads of Sicilian red prawns to extract an ultra-pure essence.

Having sampled a dish made with these crimson-coloured crustaceans at Zafferano (the flavour is sweet, milky and creamy; think amaebi, but more luscious), one can only imagine the impact the elixir would have in a stock or broth. Perhaps when preparing prawn noodles or laksa, because why not?



In the fruit and veg aisle, uncommon produce such as heirloom tomatoes, Jerusalem artichokes, round yellow zucchinis, Japanese muskmelons, white asparagus and ramps (wild garlic leaves) vie for your attention. We're told that we've just missed the season of Korean strawberries and matsutake mushrooms.

In its new digs, Culina is also diversifying to embrace more Asian produce and products. Entire shelves are devoted to Vietnamese fish sauces, Taiwanese soy sauces, and Korean marinades. Even the spirits offering is taking on an Asian persuasion: Sake is gradually being introduced alongside Old- and New World wines.

With such a bounty at his fingertips, Australian-born chef Timothy de Souza – who spent a decade in COMO Hotels and Resorts kitchens in the Caribbean and the Maldives, and who most recently headed COMO Cuisine – found himself in culinary heaven.

"When you've got products this good, you try and honour them as best as possible," he told CNA Luxury. "My cooking philosophy in general – and over the last 18 years – is that fresh produce is the cornerstone of all good food, no matter what.



"Now that I've got this space and this Marketplace to use, the next six months are going to be interesting. We've had such a good following at Block 8, and now we want to try and bring something new to the table... while still remaining loyal to the flavours that everyone knows.

"You'll see a lot more changes on our daily specials menu where we will be highlighting the product, the producer, the seasonality of the vegetables etc. Right now we're using white asparagus – they're on our vegetable assiette. They have a short life span. In three weeks they're going to be gone. At the moment we're using ramps as well. Coming up we've got truffle season. All I'm going to be doing is honouring those products simply. Not too much purees, not too much colour. The products speak for themselves, and [I want to let] the flavours shine through on the plate."

The best part about having the Bistro adjacent to the Marketplace is that you can select your choice ingredients, and then have de Souza and his team prepare them the way you like it. Just note the Bistro's operation hours if you're planning to do so in the month of May (only lunch and dinner service available; all-day dining from June onwards).

CULINA MARKET

Weekdays: 10am – 10pm

Weekends and Public Holidays: 9am – 10pm

CULINA BISTRO

May: Daily, 11am – 3pm; 6pm – 11pm (Last order: 10pm)

June onwards: Daily, 11am – 11pm (Last order: 10pm)

Email: reservations@culina.com.sg