

Small Plates, Big Flavor

Tapas-style dining offers a fun way to enjoy a myriad of taste sensations.

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**La Courgette – Roasted Zucchini
with Eggplant Caviar**
L'Atelier du Joël Robuchon, MGM Grand



Avocado Canelonne
Julian Serrano, ARIA Resort & Casino

Whether it's Spanish tapas at the bar, a Mediterranean-inspired spread of mezze (tasting portions) before a night out or a five-course tasting menu served in a formal dining room, we're enchanted with the small plate dining experience. What's not to love? The intensely flavorful, starter-sized dishes are easy to eat and share, and the fun of ordering collectively – mixing and matching the dishes that sound best – is a great way to kick start any evening. Best of all, you don't have to commit to a single entrée when you just want a nibble or when everything on the menu looks so good you can't decide what to choose.

Las Vegas chefs have embraced the small plate concept because it showcases a wide range of flavors, ingredients and pairings in a single meal. They know customers expect an unforgettable experience, regardless of whether they are pre-theatre noshing, special-occasion dining or late-night lounging. Even if they're just out for a cocktail on a warm evening and want a little bite, or eating light before this summer's swimsuit season arrives, guest can still expect great attention to detail in each dish and to

fully enjoy what the kitchen has to offer. Bars have ramped up their food offerings with small plate menus too, making them a dining destination in their own right. For a classic, Italian-inspired meal, the wine lounge at Onda Ristorante at The Mirage offers a great place to hang out and

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enjoy a bite and drink before heading to see The Beatles LOVE by Cirque du Soleil or Terry Fator & His Cast of Thousands. The stuzzichini (appetizer) menu is the focus in the lounge and is complemented by unique tasting options like wine and olive oil flights that make the experience much more than just a quick meal.

“Some may argue that the Spanish have the corner on the small plate/tapas market,” said The Mirage Executive Chef Jeff Braun. “But I think that every

culture has a way to enjoy smaller portions of food including Italy's stuzzichini. We emphasize the flavors that come straight from the richness of Italian heritage, like wonderful regional Italian olive oils, fresh basil, garlic, balsamic vinegar and Parmigiano Reggiano.” Chef Braun ensures that the wine lounge menu

offers the best of Italian cuisine: classic dishes that show off both traditional regional and Italian-American influences. You'll find beautifully made standards such as Eggplant Caponata on the menu, along with an impressive selection of artisan cheeses and cured Italian meats such as prosciutto de Parma and sopressata. Bone Marrow with roasted garlic, Goat Cheese Fritters with Umbrian lentils and Brussels sprouts with prosciutto and breadcrumbs keep the menu interesting, which means that Onda is

a great spot to go with a group with varying tastes.

The Porcini Mushroom Tart is a favorite here, served with a drizzle of aged balsamic vinegar and extra virgin olive oil. The mushrooms are incredibly rich and earthy and the overall simplicity of the dish gives it a rustic charm that's tough to beat.

While Onda is the perfect atmosphere for a casual and satisfying stop on your way to or from a night

The combination of small plates can make the meal, allowing you to try different things that all complement each other.

out at the theater, L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon at MGM Grand is the show. The unique open kitchen creates an atmosphere like none other. The vibe is friendly and the food is beyond fabulous, worthy of its one-star Michelin rating. The bar is exactly where you want to enjoy tapas, the special tasting menu and wines from around the world. Watch your food be prepared and experience what the "Chef of the Century" has to offer at his aptly named restaurant, which means "workshop" in French.

Executive Chef Steve Benjamin worked as sous chef at L'Atelier Paris before opening the Las Vegas location. He and other chefs from Paris collaborate with Chef Robuchon on the menu, which is French at its core, but influenced by Spain's tapas-style dining. The team's personal experiences and influences appear in the dishes, which always fit Robuchon's philosophy of respecting and maintaining the original flavor of an ingredient,

regardless of how innovative the dish may seem.

Poached baby Kusshi oysters with French butter, seasoned with chopped chives and lemon juice, is just one illustration of how the restaurant executes the small plate concept with elegance and simplicity. "It's a nice product that requires very limited preparation. It just needs some seasoning and it's ready to be enjoyed," said Chef Benjamin.

When dining out tapas-style, the combination of small plates can make the meal, allowing you to try different things that all complement each other. "If I were to eat dinner at L'Atelier tonight," said Chef Benjamin, "I would start with the foie gras ravioli, then the oysters and would finish with sweetbreads. The ravioli is a spectacular appetizer...foie gras-filled, bite-size raviolis served in a chicken broth with some cilantro, basil and other herbs."

The trio dishes offered at MICHAEL MINA Bellagio are another prime example of a perfectly executed pairing of small plates – but in this case the mixing and matching is done for you with a custom-made plate offering three versions of a dish. The Sashimi: Roots, Shoots and Fruits Trio features three sashimi preparations perfect for a spring or summer meal. The beautifully plated trio includes fluke with radish, daikon sprouts and honeycrisp apple; snapper with fresh wasabi, cilantro and lemon;

IGNITE Sushi Bar and Lounge

Small plates have gained popularity throughout the country in part because they are so appealing when you're out on the town. IGNITE Sushi Bar and Lounge at MGM Grand Detroit has taken a cue from the success of small plate menus by offering an extensive menu of hand-rolled sushi.

The array of exotic sushi and premium cocktails is just another take on the small plate trend and it adds an exciting element to the nightlife setting, which includes a private cigar room, selection of premium spirits and themed party events.

and hamachi with red beets, sorrel and chilled grape. A heartier dish is the Surf and Turf Trio: a rib eye with grilled lobster; Kobe petit filet with crab 'Oscar' crust; and langoustine with bone marrow.

Product and seasonality govern the menu at MICHAEL MINA, and the result is an upbeat, contemporary California-style cuisine with an emphasis on wine. Master Sommelier Joe Phillips has developed an incredible wine program that offers an extensive list featuring limited-production American and European vineyard selections. A seasonal wine



Porcini Mushroom Tart with Aged Balsamic and Tuscan Olive Oil
Onda Ristorante and Wine Lounge,
The Mirage



Trio of Sashimi: Roots, Shoots and Fruits
MICHAEL MINA Bellagio

series tasting menu pairs wines from a specific winery with a series of small plates, and showcases the best of the best. Similarly, a cookbook tasting menu and a vegetarian menu are offered.

"Our trios and tastings allow our guests the opportunity to try many flavor combinations throughout their dinner," said the restaurant's executive chef, Marc St. Jacques. He describes the food as spontaneous seasonal cuisine, saying, "Anything can be an inspiration for a new dish. From a country, to a color, to a rhyme...you never

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know!" It's this attitude that makes the dishes here feel, look and taste exciting and approachable.

If sashimi and wine pairing menus are a departure from your definition of tapas-style dining, head to Julian Serrano at ARIA Resort & Casino at CityCenter for a pitcher of sangria and a plate of Stuffed Piquillo Peppers. Award-winning Chef Julian Serrano brought his memorable French and Mediterranean-inspired cooking to Bellagio as executive chef at Picasso,

but his newly opened Spanish-themed namesake restaurant, which encourages the country's custom of nibbling on flavor-packed dishes while enjoying great drinks and good company, is a dream come true for this Madrid native.

The restaurant's executive chef, Jose Lopez-Picazo, assists Serrano in creating a menu of primarily traditional Spanish-style tapas, flavored by onions, garlic, tomatoes, saffron, paprika and spices. Classics like Chicken Croquetas (fried patties) and Escalibada (grilled vegetables) are offered, but so are creative

takes such as prime tenderloin with Brie cheese on toasted bread, or salmon with a truffle béchamel and Portobello mushrooms. Imported Spanish pata negra ham is on the menu, as well as other classics such as ceviche and paella. There are a few unexpected twists that keep things upbeat and reflect the executive chef's flair for Asian cuisine such as scallops freshly sliced with soy sauce, mango, pineapple and a ginger rocoto-pepper sauce.

The Huevos Estrellados, eggs with fried potatoes and imported Spanish chorizo, paired with the Tinto Pesquera from Ribera del Duero is an amazing match and spotlights the ingredients in the dish. "It's the most simple dish and is packed with the most explosive combination of flavors," said Serrano.

When asked what his perfect tapas pairing would be, the chef answers definitively: Chicken Croquetas, Calamari a la Plancha and Pintxo de Chorizos. "I chose these three items because they involve different


ingredients and techniques that complement each other in unexpected ways," he said.

"We cook a la plancha (on a griddle) a lot and Executive Chef Lopez-Picazo likes to cook using sous-vide (vacuum sealed poaching). However, the most important thing is to always use the highest quality ingredients," said Serrano.

One of the newest small plate menus to hit Vegas is at Silk Road in Vdara Hotel & Spa, CityCenter's green-minded, boutique hotel, where both the food and the décor are exotic, colorful and contemporary. Executive Chef Martin Heierling, who created the critically acclaimed Sensi at Bellagio, has brought Mediterranean cuisine with Asian influences to this new restaurant. The result is a menu featuring a selection of lively, appetizer-portioned mezze such as Crispy Fried Calamari with whipped avocado and tomato dip as well as Popcorn Shrimp Lettuce Wraps with mango slaw and sweet chili mayo. Like most dishes here, Silk Road's Heirloom Beet and Goat Cheese salad is anything but ordinary.

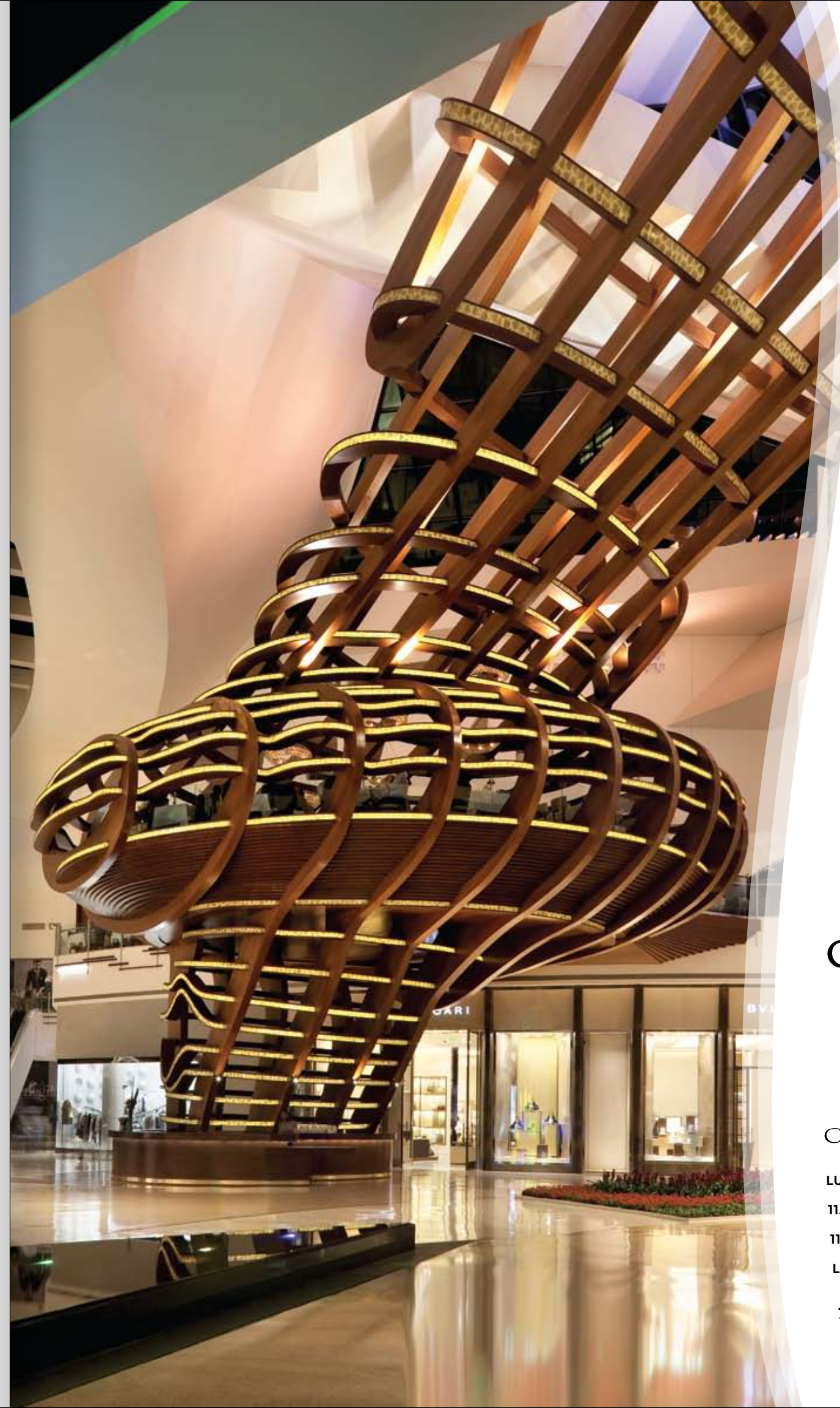
"Our menu offers dishes that are complex but playful," said Heierling. "Because I draw my inspiration from the Silk Road that connects Asia to Europe, I utilize a variety of cooking techniques and preparations. That means our guests are able to enjoy a wide array of flavors and combinations."

The German-born chef's world travels as the chief cook on the Swiss Royal Yacht set the scene for a culinary adventure at Silk Road. The menu draws from the four corners of the world, in a dining room surrounded by walls of glass, it is fresh and vibrant at daybreak and filled with warm sunlight during lunch.

The appeal of small plates menus is undeniable. From light appetites to adventurous eaters to wallet-conscious diners, there is something for everyone and the focus is on having a good time and exploring what the restaurant has to offer. The chefs at these unique restaurants are ready to deliver small plates to your table in a big way, so gather with friends, share a few drinks and delicious food and enjoy good conversation. 



Heirloom Beet and Goat Cheese Salad
Silk Road, Vdara Hotel & Spa



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