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**Chef Fratini**

PHOTO: AIDAN LOO

## Coming full circle

**Gabriel Fratini**

WHEN Gabriel Fratini first came to Singapore to work in 1988, the straight-talking Italian landed the job of head chef of DOMVS Italian restaurant Sheraton Towers – then one of the fanciest (and priciest) eateries in town. After almost three decades which saw him open his own restaurants in Singapore, Australia, Italy and then back again in 2013 with his eponymous eatery Fratini, he's now come full circle.

Come Aug 22 thereabouts, he will open DOMVS by Gabriel Fratini – a collaboration between him and the hotel on Scotts Road.

"DOMVS means home, so basically I'm going back home. I'm getting a bit older now, and I would like to retire there, so I am going full circle. I started in Singapore at DOMVS and I will finish in Singapore at DOMVS," says the 58-year-old chef who is a native of Pescara in Northern Italy.

He will officially take over next week, and intends to do some renovations to replace the carpet with parquet floors before soft-launching with the restaurant's new name.

"It will be a different concept, only omakase style, no a la carte," says chef Fratini. While plans aren't concrete yet, he estimates that lunch will have about five to six courses at around S\$58++, while dinner will be eight to 10 courses from about S\$128++.

"I will serve, say, four separate appetisers, then a couple of different pastas, a couple of main courses, and then dessert. Depending on what people like to eat, and what I buy fresh from the market that day, I will do a menu tailored for them," he explains.

The opportunity came about by chance one day, when chef Fratini ran into the hotel's general manager at the Food & Hotel Asia expo earlier this year. At the time, he had just sold his two-year-old restaurant Fratini La Trattoria at Greenwood Avenue, and was looking to take on a new project.

"The challenge for me is to make DOMVS famous again. Back when I was working there for two years, it was one of the few high-end restaurants for people to have nice meals. I want people to remember that," says the chef.

In order to make the restaurant memo-



# New directions

Three well-known chefs challenge themselves by trying out a different concept, making a job switch and venturing overseas. **By Rachel Loi**



### NO A LA CARTE

Among the potential dishes that may be served on chef Fratini's degustation menus are (clockwise from left): Scampi linguine with cherry tomato and asparagus; thin sliced fillet of beef on a bed of potato crowned with summer truffle; and tiramisu with meringue sugar basket filled with panna cotta and wild berries.

able, chef Fratini believes that food today has to be creative, not just in technique or flavours, but also in the individual dishes – hence his preference for degustation menus.

"People go out today to eat at restaurants not just to fill their stomach, but to enjoy the meal and ambience. That's why the top Italian restaurant in the world belongs to chef Massimo Bottura, who does a modern style of Italian cooking, with traditional flavours," he says.

That's what he will be doing at DOMVS by Gabriel Fratini as well.

"I've been doing this same style of cooking for over 30 years, buying fresh and cooking it that day. I like to change the menu so I don't get bored of cooking the same food every day. Anyway if I cooked the same dish every day for a year, every day it will taste different because we're not robots in the kitchen. We are human beings and we have to change dishes daily according to ingredients and tastes," he adds.



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## Change in career path

**Patrick Heuberger**

CAN there really be such a thing as bringing home too much bacon? Patrick Heuberger certainly seems to think so.

After running his French takeaway and dine-in eatery Casse Croute at the Park West Condo Clubhouse – which proved to be successful despite its out-of-the-way location – for the last year, he decided to call it quits.

“At the start there was no aircon, so I put in aircon and suddenly it became a very popular place for dine-in,” says 42-year-old chef Heuberger. “The average cheque slowly became higher and higher as people came to eat and drink wine. Instead of being a snack bar selling charcuterie retail and small bites, it suddenly became a proper restaurant. But that was not really what I wanted it to be.”

It was taking up more of his time, taking him away from his family, to the point that he decided he wanted more of a balance in his life.

So instead, he took on a job offer at Huber's Butchery in Dempsey, as an assistant general manager in the retail section.

He explains: “I will assist the general manager for the whole retail section. I wasn't hired to make charcuterie specifically, but I will help bring ideas and develop the selection, while teaching cooking



### MOOVING ON

As an assistant general manager in the retail section of Huber's Butchery in Dempsey, chef Heuberger will help bring ideas and develop its selection, while teaching cooking classes and giving recommendations to customers.

PHOTO: AIDAN LOO

classes in our studio and giving recommendations to customers.”

Adds chef Heuberger: “My customers asked me if I will make charcuterie at Huber's, but the answer is no. I will do a few eventually, but it will take time. I won't make the range I had at Casse Croute but I might make one or two things that were popular, like my duck rillettes,” he says.

The Swiss-born chef is one of a few people in Singapore who have learned proper charcuterie-making techniques, after travelling to France to apprentice at two different family-run Charcuterie Traiteur in the Brittany and Languedoc-Roussillon regions over a total of three months. Of

course his growing business was not the only reason he ended Casse Croute's run. He wanted to spend more time with his family, now that his wife is due to give birth to a baby girl in September.

Not to mention, chef Heuberger is also training for the Best Caterer In The World competition in Lyon next January, alongside Brandon Foo from the French restaurant Le Bistrot du Sommelier – which he used to hold shares in.

“I was trying to train for the competition while running the business and it was complicated. I couldn't cope. So when the offer from Huber's came, I decided to take the opportunity because I think it came at the right time. I need more time for train-

ing for the competition and more time for my family. So I decided it may be a good opportunity for me to exit the food business and work for someone instead.”

For now, he intends to focus on his new full-time job, with plans to widen Huber's range of charcuterie. There are no plans for another business of his own though, so fans will just have to sit tight and wait.

“It will take a bit of time to get the Huber's staff to know how to do charcuterie, and to get the facilities also. The facilities at the retail shop today are not appropriate for cooking. So we need to find space and time to do it. Huber's is a great platform though, so I hope I can help them with some of my knowledge.”



## Venturing Down Under

**Lino Sauro**

SIX years after he opened the Sicilian restaurant Gattopardo here in Singapore, Chef Lino Sauro is all set to test the waters abroad, with plans to open a new restaurant in Sydney.

“We are still fine-tuning the details, but it will be based on the Mediterranean style of cuisine, exploring quality ingredients, and I am looking forward to working with the local farmers as there is so much variety out there,” says 45-year-old chef Sauro, who ran Gattopardo at Hotel Fort Can-

ning for three years before relocating to its current location at Tras Street.

The genesis of this overseas venture came about some time last year, after one of his regular diners – who happens to come from Australia – suggested it to him.

“We met the right partner; the synergy was right, and we share the same beliefs about the direction of the restaurant, and the vision to bring my philosophy of cooking to Australia,” says chef Sauro, who jokes that he has already lost count of the number of times he's travelled back and forth since their interaction.

He adds: “I'm personally very excited about this venture. It's an exciting time in the dining scene in the city, with many

**‘It's an exciting time in the dining scene in the city, with many chefs pushing the boundaries and developing their culinary styles. There's an entire new world of ingredients, ideas, concepts to explore.’**

**Chef Sauro on plans to open a new restaurant in Sydney**

FILE PHOTO

chefs pushing the boundaries and developing their culinary styles. There's an entire new world of ingredients, ideas, concepts to explore. I cannot wait to start.”

Although most details about the new restaurant have yet to be confirmed – such as the chef de cuisine, the specific dishes, and the name, chef Sauro says it will likely open by the end of this year at Sydney's new lifestyle precinct called Kensington Street. The same area is also home to one of Singapore's other restaurateurs – Frederic Colin of Brasserie Gavroche here, as well as international names such as Jason Atherton who opened Kensington Street Social.

Chef Sauro himself will be in charge of

developing the new menu too, and hopes to bring his cooking philosophy – of sourcing for good produce by forging close relationships with local farmers – to the Sydney restaurant.

As for the existing Gattopardo, he assures customers that he will still remain as chef-partner after it undergoes renovations in the next few months. He explains: “There will be exciting progress, which has been in the works for a while... It will 'shed its skin', and we will introduce a new vibe, new dishes, new presentation of dishes, and a much more energetic and approachable ambience.

“The core, however, will remain the same. We will still focus on discovering and showcasing quality seafood and be inspired by Sicilian traditions,” he adds.

According to chef Sauro, this renovation is a way of staying updated and relevant to the local dining scene, especially now that the economic downturn means more customers who are “cautious about spending”.

“Whatever I do the mission is still the same as it was on Day One. I really believe in promoting Italian cuisine, to share with the customers that there is so much diversity in it. We have made progress over the 10 years, but we still have a long way to go to shape people's perception of Italian cuisine,” he says.

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