



Garlic prawns on the tapas menu at WTF.
Photo: Edward Wong

Small bites, big taste

With an emphasis on socialising and drinking, it's little wonder tapas restaurants have taken off in the city, writes Vicki Williams

For Barcelona native Lluis Tarrida, tapas are not a meal, they are something that you nibble on in the convivial atmosphere of a bar. "In Barcelona, eating out is never just about tapas. Tapas are things to have with drinks at a bar before going for dinner with friends or family. The emphasis is on the socialising and the drinking, but always with tapas, which stimulate the appetite," says Tarrida, chef at Comilonas private kitchen.

In other parts of Spain, things are different. In Madrid, people have a meal of just tapas, visiting bars and restaurants specialising in these snacks that are a short walking distance from each other.

In Hong Kong, it is also possible to tapas bar-hop for snacking with

drinks, or have them as dinner. But does the food give diners the real taste of Spain?

For Tarrida, who has lived in Hong Kong for 10 years, it increasingly does: "More people in Hong Kong are familiar with Spanish cuisine and so are more willing to experiment. As a result there are now more restaurants serving authentic tasting dishes."

He believes that BCN, which opened in June, is one example: "The food is very good, the tapas are evolved, and I like the social aspect – the interaction with the chef and other diners."

The first British chef to complete an internship at the famed El Bulli restaurant in Catalonia, Spain, Jason

Atherton is hoping to recreate that social vibe. He will be opening a tapas restaurant in Wan Chai late next month.

So are tapas going to be trend-obsessed Hong Kong's next big thing? With the recent opening of BCN, this month's opening of a branch of New York's Boqueria, and Atherton's arrival, it's certainly a possibility. Here are some notable entrants of the past few years.

Boqueria Hong Kong

The restaurant is named after Barcelona's famous food market, and will feature an open kitchen serving traditional tapas. There will be a second serving more substantial dishes designed for

sharing – whole fish, suckling pig and paella. The menu will be similar to that of the New York restaurant, with signature tapas such as *bombas de la Barceloneta* (beef and potato croquettes, *salsa brava*, aioli), and *patatas bravas* (crispy fried potatoes with a spicy tomato sauce and aioli).

Draught Estrella Damm beer and a range of Spanish wine, sherry, cava and sangria are planned to complement the food.

David Izquierdo, formerly of Uno Mas, is heading the kitchen. He is back in town after spending a year in his native Spain. Communal dining will feature, and there will also be a tapas bar seating 30. To create a buzz, the restaurant will be hosting a complimentary cocktail-style tasting