

A COLONY'S *NEW* *GROOVE*

It's been almost two decades since Macau's handover from Portugal to China – but a new wave of entrepreneurs is harking back to the city's colonial past. **Pavan Shamdasani** searches for old-school-style establishments around the city's backstreets



Most people see Macau as its moniker: the Vegas of Asia, a hedonistic city of gambling and gastronomy, chic casinos, and high-end restaurants. To some (particularly those who remember the city before it was handed back to China), it's still a place where ancient Portuguese charms thrive.

Away from the rambling backstreets of Macau's old quarters, a new breed of nostalgic entrepreneurs is infusing the city with hints of its colonial past. Latter-day bars, cafés, and restaurants may have opened long after the 1999 handover, but these businesses still hark back to the city's Portuguese heritage alongside contemporary touches that fit in with modern Macau. Here are four places that keep the city's unique spirit alive.



"Compared to neighbouring European countries – France, Italy, Spain – Portuguese wine is often underappreciated."



🏠
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pair whose love for Macau's heritage is firmly on display throughout the entire space. The extensive drinks menu of MacauSoul is dedicated solely to Portuguese wine, featuring an impressive 600-plus labels on offer, while the food is predominantly traditional tavern snacks, such as cured ham and cheese. Also, the décor is crisp, boasting handsome dark wood and leather furnishings set against conventional paintings. It's also evident that the Higginses are passionate about Macau's lesser-known jazz scene, with regular live showcases playing in a dedicated basement performance venue.

It's one thing to talk about Macau's heritage, and another altogether to experience it. "To appreciate Macau, and MacauSoul, you really need to make a personal visit," says owner Jacky Higgins.



ABOVE:
An inviting plate of seafood *paella* from Antonio

THE RESTAURANT



Antonio

Antonio only opened in 2007, yet the restaurant has already won dozens of international awards over the past decade, including a coveted Michelin rating. This famous dining spot is also a standout for traditional Portuguese cuisine in Taipa Village, a historic area long renowned for its fair share of age-old, homestyle restaurants. What separates Antonio from its counterparts is the restaurant's attention to detail; a blend of

classic and contemporary that feel as natural in the décor as it does in its cuisine.

The interiors also possess a nautical theme that pays homage to Macau's port status – with striking white, yellow, and blue tiles, and intimate candlelit tables set closely together. Meanwhile, the menu takes classic Macanese dishes and gives them modern twists, including codfish done four ways, seafood stew in a copper pot, and African chicken

with coconut sauce.

"The societal bond of Macau society is quite different today compared to the old times, especially with the ever-increasing number of casinos making life in Macau constantly busier," says Antonio Coelho, chef/owner of Antonio. "Macau is a small place, but many people still enjoy it here. For me, that enjoyment is reflected in the simplicity of the restaurant, where locals and tourists have shared serenity."

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THE BAR



MacauSoul

Compared to neighbouring European countries – France, Italy, Spain – Portuguese wine is often underappreciated. Macau's history as a former Portuguese colony keeps the country's viniculture alive, but it wasn't until MacauSoul opened in 2008 when the city began to truly appreciate its wine.

Set in the shadows of St. Paul's ruins, the bar is run by retired British husband-and-wife David and Jacky Higgins, a



O COME, OLD YE FAITHFUL

Take a trip down gastronomic history at three of Macau's pioneer eating joints.

Fat Siu Lau

Must-eat: *shek ki* (roasted pigeon)

📍 64 Rua da Felicidade, Macau; +853 2857 3580

A Vencedora

Must-eat: *feijoda* (traditional meat-and-bean stew)

📍 Pak Nin Son Building, 264 Rua do Campo, Macau; +853 2835 5460

Solmar

Must-eat: African Chicken and baked Portuguese rice

📍 512 Avenida da Praia Grande, Macau; +853 2888 1881



THE CAFÉ Cathedral Café

The classic-style coffee stop of Cathedral Café is an intrinsically European ideal – especially in Portugal, where a laidback lifestyle is high on the agenda. This java house revitalises that appealing concept through a simple hangout spot set in an old shophouse building, just a stone's throw from the historic Senado Square.

First opened in 2012, Australian owner Stephen Anderson was heavily inspired by Europe's relaxed cafés. He also felt that the only natural Asian venue for it would be the continent's most recent former colony, Macau. By

day, Cathedral Café's name rings true as a bright, airy eatery, with European breakfast menu of eggs, cheese, and Portuguese buns. As the evening crowds come rumbling in, the place transforms into a quintessential tavern, serving up Portuguese wine, port and beer, as well as heaping plates of chorizo.

"Macau's past is evolving, and the romantic memories of its Portuguese history are attracting attention from people travelling to the city and focusing on the importance of Macau as the first truly international port – 400 years before Singapore or Hong Kong," says Anderson.

📍 12 Rua da Se, Macau, +853-6685-7621

THE COMPLEX Albergue SCM

Situated in the quaint St. Lazarus district, the then-abandoned mansion of Albergue SCM now stands as a throwback complex that pays tribute to the city's past, complete with a local art gallery and a retro-Portuguese store. But it's the former mansion's restaurant – a charmingly old-fashioned



📍 8 Calçada da Igreja de S. Lazaro, Macau, +853-2852-2550

spot called Albergue 1601 – that is indeed the nod to the structure's glory years. "The recent arrival of contemporary hotels and casinos has created an immense contrast between modern architecture and Macau's heritage," says Regina Gan, Operations Manager at Albergue 1601. "In some ways, rather than eradicating history, the new era has helped to make Macau's colonial charm even more appealing."

Albergue 1601's food menu is strictly Portuguese – none of the fusion Macanese dishes such as African chicken and baked 'Portuguese' rice dishes will be found here. Rather, look forward to classic Portuguese fare, including codfish cakes, sardines, and steamed clams. And to ensure that the surroundings fully complement the menu, interiors have been restored; new furnishings and tiles are imports from Portugal, and the restaurant's ambient music is era-appropriate with songs from 1930s singer Amalia Rodrigues.

"There is a lot of potential for Portuguese culture to revive and thrive in Macau," says Gan. **G**



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ABOVE: Patrons enjoy light drinks and tipples at Cathedral Cafe