

Herald food critic **Terry Durack** eats out for a living. So what were the highlights of his month?

itup Dish



Chargrilled swordfish, slow-cooked tomatoes, pearl couscous, salted grapes, lemon oil @ Omage

Recently returned from a family trip through Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt, chef Darryl Martin has scattered postcards of Middle Eastern flavours on the menu at his modern diner in Baulkham Hills. They pop up in the aromatic, duck-filled, brik-pastry cigars with chestnut puree and persimmon, in the confit chicken topped with warm, sticky dates and in this cheeky, colourful take on chargrilled swordfish (\$30). The chunky steak is all but buried under a rock pile of big, bouncy pearl couscous (mograbieh), roasted tomatoes and salted grapes, and flavoured with lemon oil and fresh dill.

Omage Shop 2, 8 Century Circuit, Norwest Business Park, Baulkham Hills. Phone: 9894 6499.



Morçilla con huevo @ El Capo

Omar Andrade is well known for his guerrilla dining ventures and there's more than a touch of the pop-ups in his new Latino-inspired eatery on Surry Hills's hottest new dining strip. Taking its design inspiration from South American drug cartels and "narco" cinema, El Capo combines murals incorporating guns, girls and scorpions with the flavours of Mexico, Colombia and Puerto Rico. There's a killer ceviche but the hit dish on chef Joey Astorga's menu is this dramatic, textural minefield of crisply fried, house-made morçilla blood sausage teamed with a gel-like, slow-cooked egg and a brilliant-yellow saffron aioli (\$20). They call it "good food for bad people". We call it addictive.

El Capo 52 Waterloo Street, Surry Hills.
Phone: 9699 2518.



KFQ (fried quail Kentucky-style) @ Concrete Blonde

Yes, there's a lot of concrete involved in the high-energy high-drama, rustic-industrial fit-out of this Kings Cross newcomer. Plenty of blondes, too, gathered on the front terrace or by the horizontal designer fire. In the glam, razzle-dazzle, on-view kitchen, well-travelled chef Patrick Dang presides over a battery of gleaming rotisseries, drawing on Mexican, Mediterranean and Asian influences. No prizes for guessing where the inspiration came from for this crisp, crunchy, fried quail entrée (\$14). First cured, the meat is then poached, marinated in buttermilk, coated in seasoned flour with secret herbs and spices and deep-fried. Finger-licking, indeed.

Concrete Blonde Shop 2, 33 Bayswater Road, Kings Cross. Phone: 9380 8307.

side Dish

Hungry for more?

Cheap treat

Bacon and egg roll with rocket and aioli (\$8) at Armchair Collective, the new combined lifestyle store and cafe that mixes vintage furniture with brunchy breakfasts. 9A Darley Street East, Mona Vale. Phone: 9999 2871.

Best bite

Vietnamese banh cuon (\$8.90) at Wrap & Roll – warm, freshly steamed ricepaper rolls filled with mushrooms and minced pork and topped with crisp-fried shallots. Level 5, Westfield Sydney, city. Phone: 8072 7050.

Cafe stop

As well as baking bread for our top restaurants, the new Sonoma HQ dishes up fine sandwiches, good coffee and big \$10 bowls of soup. 32 Birmingham Street, Alexandria. Phone: 8338 1051.



Chicken liver, taro cracker, achar @ Claude's

Claude's is still tiny. That's about the only thing that hasn't changed at this born-again dining spot. The new, translucent door opens to a richly toned dining room, where an à la carte menu now joins the multi-course dégustation. While French technique is still key, Chui Lee Luk is now channelling her Malaysian Chinese heritage to charming effect in dishes such as slow-cooked pork shoulder and abalone in a herbal broth, and ocean trout with dried shrimp and roe. This clever combo of crisp taro cracker, cubes of chicken liver parfait, finely diced Indian pickles and pearls of spice-dressed sago (\$8) makes the perfect starter.

Claude's 10 Oxford Street, Woollahra. Phone: 9331 2325.