

# VERTU SELECT



## **David Laris: new restaurant, less chairs**

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'I wanted somewhere to get back to my food, while I have all these concepts, in my heart I'm still a chef. It's my own private dining room and I'm never happier than when I am in that kitchen,' says Laris, who cooks modern European dishes with a fusion twist at his new restaurant 12 Chairs four or five times a week.

David Laris – who sharpened his knives as executive chef of Sir Terence Conran's London restaurant Mezzo – has revolutionised the Shanghai fine dining scene since arriving in 2003.

Laris is no stranger to Asia, having worked in 1993 at the Mandarin Oriental in Macau and then in Singapore, as one of the master chefs for a gourmet summit. It was here that Laris was approached about a project at Shanghai's Three on the Bund. Despite worries about how to source ingredients he was persuaded to visit. He fell in love with the building and joined the executive committee. The chef opened his eponymous restaurant, Laris, at Three on the Bund in 2004. 'Laris was a moment in time when Shanghai changed,' claims David. And indeed the restaurant received critical acclaim – winning awards in publications such as Miele Guide and Condé Nast Traveler.

Laris's claims that he changed Shanghai's restaurant industry are not unfounded. Restaurants like his gave their workers a career rather than a job. Service standards rose sharply and the effects of this can be enjoyed today. 'The level of staff we can draw on now compared to eight years ago is incredible. We have a real industry here now.'

Creating good food was also initially a challenge. 'In the beginning days when we had less choice of ingredients it was about being clever in creating a world class product.' Laris goes on to say that it is now possible to get an ever-increasing range of goods in Shanghai.

In 2008 chef became brand with the formation of David Laris Creates. Along with consultancy work this has led to a cornucopia of restaurant concepts. Many of these such as The Fat Olive and The Purple Onion borrow heavily from David's Greek Australian roots. These aim to be 'good honest restaurants that do really good food that any level of society can go to.'

2010 turned out to be 'a year of ups and downs.' The most noticeable was the closure of Laris. However, with 12 Chairs it seems that David Laris is once again at the forefront of changing the Shanghai dining scene. And with plans for expansion to other areas of China plus talk of a new smaller namesake restaurant it seems that Laris is still on the boil.

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