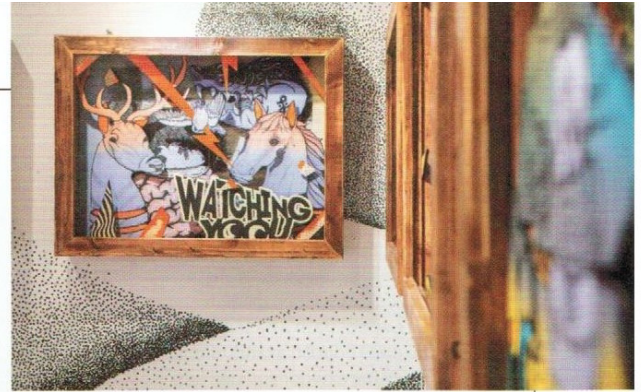


## AS THE SUN SETS

If there's anywhere that embodies the spirit of the new, up-and-coming Sai Ying Pun, it's art gallery Above Second. Manager Lauren Every-Wortman describes its focus as "urban contemporary art", with street-style work from local crews such as Parent's Parents and international artists such as Tristan Eaton. "We like to give shows to local artists as well as up-and-coming international artists," says Every-Wortman.

Cheap rent is what drew Every-Wortman to Sai Ying Pun, but the neighbourhood's evolving spirit convinced the gallery manager to stick around, even after it was priced out of its original location above Second Street. "We like to say we started the change," jokes Every-Wortman. The gallery now has a new space on First Street, but a name change is not on the cards.

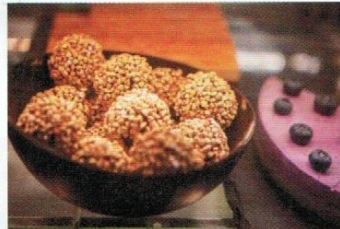
A few metres away is another First Street newcomer, Sips, a beer and liquor shop run by Annie Lam, owner of the Beer Bay in Central. Lam was walking through Sai Ying Pun one day when she noticed a shop space for lease in the new Island Crest, an upscale redevelopment project that has drawn many young professionals to Sai Ying Pun. She thought it would make a good outpost for the British ales she imports to Hong Kong. "People gather outside in the evening to have some drinks after work," she says.



**ALE AND ARTY:** urban contemporary art at gallery Above Second; (below) enjoy a decent pint at Sips.



**THOUGHT FOR FOOD:** (clockwise from left) salmon tartare at Metropolitan; savoury pancakes at Stack; desserts at Grassroots Pantry.



## TUCK IN

A night out requires a fortifying meal. "I love the little hole-in-the-wall restaurants – they are what make the neighbourhood good," says Laurie Goldberg, a beer importer who has lived in Sai Ying Pun for the past two years. One of those is Kam Kee Cafe, a bing sutt (like a cha chaan teng but without the rice dishes) on Des Voeux Road. First opened in Shau Kei Wan in 1967 by Chiu Chow immigrant Chan Gui-chou, a massive rent hike forced it to close in 2012 – but not before the business and most of its interior furnishings were rescued by regular customer Ray Chui, who bought them from Chan and found a new home for the operation in Sai Ying Pun. The menu is well stocked with classic fare such as egg sandwiches and "beef juice" (a glass of hot beef stock), but Chan has also added some more substantial dinnertime options such as wok-fried chicken and potato salad.

There are plenty more options for a satisfying nosh in unpretentious surroundings. BBQ Mei Sik Dim offers simple grilled dishes and cheap beer in a lively space. The Awakening serves up fresh, simple Western grub in low-key surroundings, with roasted vegetables and quinoa salad, along with some

indulgences such as chicken wings. Grassroots Pantry specialises in vegetarian dishes made with locally grown ingredients. It has recently been joined by sister restaurant, Prune, a breakfast-and-lunch space that shares the emphasis on nutritious vegetarian food while also playing host to cooking workshops.

"I moved out here three years ago because the rent was affordable," says chef/owner Peggy Chan. "We spend more on quality of food, training and staff than rent." Chan runs a tight ship to keep quality high without throwing too much cash around. So far, word of mouth and a loyal following has kept the business afloat. "We have broken even every month since the second month," she says.

Despite rising rents, Sai Ying Pun still offers a chance for entrepreneurs to try something out of the ordinary. That's the case for restaurateur twins Josh and Caleb Ng, who recently opened pancake and cocktail joint Stack, on Third Street. The menu is split between sweet and savoury pancakes, including one dish of buckwheat pancakes topped with guacamole, quail's egg and paprika. A selection of house-bottled cocktails feature Chinese tipples such as Ng Ka Pei, a herbal liqueur. With Hong Kong-inspired decor (including neon lights and vintage terrazzo floors) and a large communal bar table, eating at Stack feels a bit like joining a dinner party in someone's trendy tong lau flat.

Up the hill on High Street, next to the crowds streaming up the Centre Street escalator, Metropolitan is the setting for a different kind of party. Under the guidance of owner/chef Frank Lebiez, the restaurant's simple bistro fare and boisterous crowd evoke the informal atmosphere of a cantine Française. "It's straightforward, traditional but very homey food, like duck confit – a lot of dishes that your mum prepared for you," says Lebiez. He reckons about 50 per cent of the customers are locals, 50 per cent expats, "and of the expats, about 25 per cent are French", reflecting Sai Ying Pun's growing Francophone community.