

HAUTE ASIAN — CUISINE —



A TRIO OF RESTAURANTS IN NEW YORK
PAIRS EASTERN FOOD & WESTERN WINE

BY OWEN DUGAN & JENNIFER FIEDLER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL GROSS

Asian dining has grown by leaps and bounds in the U.S. in recent decades. Many supermarkets sell fish sauce and fresh sushi. Asian fine dining restaurants—along with serious wine lists to support the food—are starting to follow.

Three notable openings in New York offer an opportunity to see what top talents can do with ambitious Asian cuisine and mostly Western wine lists. The food at Junoon, Jungsik and Brushstroke varies in origin and in how the restaurants apply themselves to the thorny questions of authenticity and satisfying a client base. There have been restaurants with serious food and good wine lists in the past—think the Mandarin in San Francisco, Yujean Kang's in Pasadena, Calif., and Tse Yang and Shun Lee Palace in New York—but now these types of places no longer seem exotic.

The current wave of Asian fine restaurants confidently weaves together culinary flavors, traditions and techniques from Asia, Europe and the United States. Not so long ago a restaurant that pulled ingredients, techniques and traditions from a number of sources seemed diffuse. Today it seems worldly. Junoon may be the most traditional of the three, but it still has elements you might not expect to find in Indian cuisine; likewise Brushstroke, which tailors *kaiseki*-style dining for Manhattan. Jungsik is an exercise in cross-pollination between Korean and American cuisine. All three share great refinement, and a particular understanding of wine.

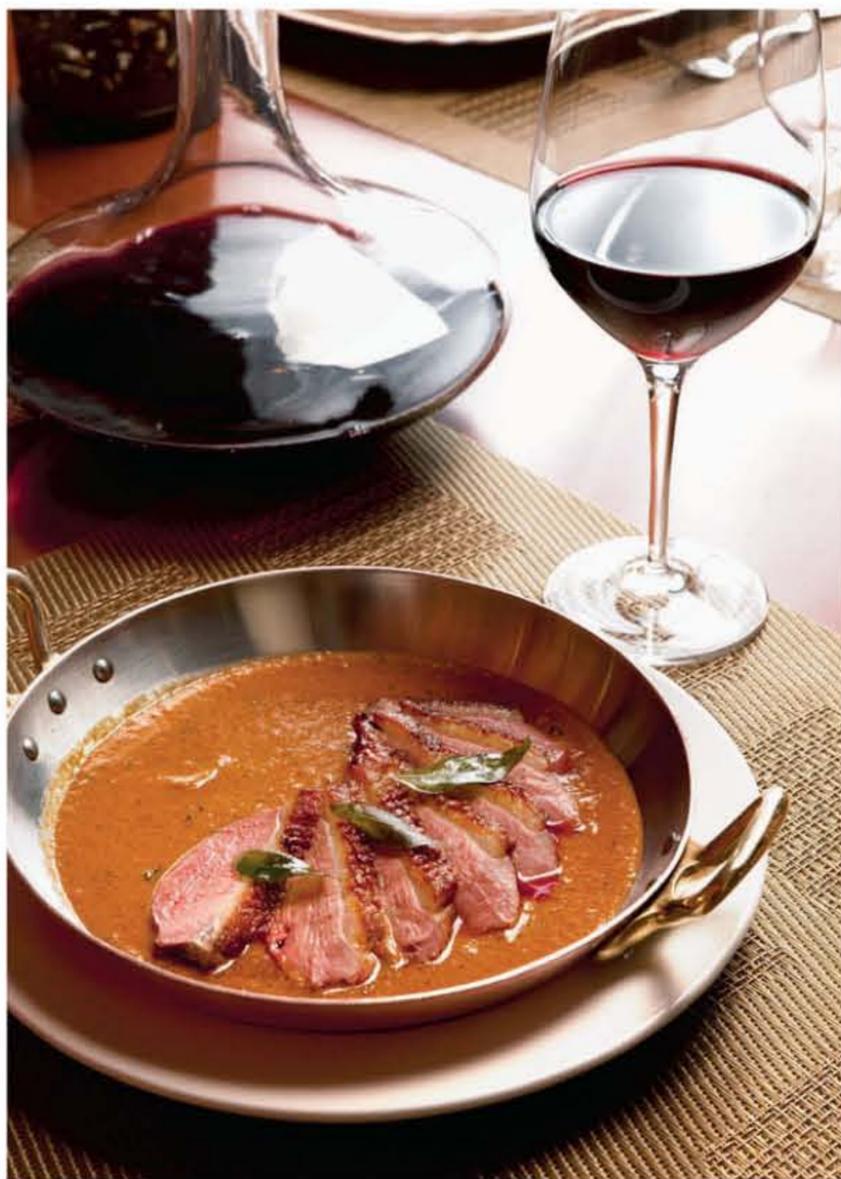
Left: At Brushstroke, an unoaked Blaufränkisch from Austria complements the intense meaty flavors in a course of toro sashimi.

JUNOON

Junoon's enormous dining room feels like an oasis. The open space, soft lighting and serene colors all make a first impression of elegance. A semiopen kitchen creates bustle at one end, and a waterfall opposite lends calm contentment. The carefully rendered Indian food and 300-selection wine list perpetuate that mood and add excitement. This is not the first time owner Rajesh Bhardwaj has implemented a vision of India in the U.S.; he also owns the Café Spice chain. But Junoon is a world apart from that.

Chef Vikas Khanna is something of a celebrity in food circles, with a long history in kitchens and a number of appearances on television. He serves layered food and balanced flavors. The opening dish is a langoustine with a mild heat, delicately herbaceous fennel, a bright Meyer lemon preserve and an earthy lobster foam. Sommelier Olivier Dufeu pairs this with Battenfeld-Spanier Riesling Trocken Rheinhessen 2008, which is truly dry and has a granitic edge.

"The dish tames the mineral in the wine," Dufeu says, "but then the mineral comes back. It has high acid throughout." He points out that while he prefers the dry wine, sweetness can also work. This flexibility comes up repeatedly; one of the credos at Junoon is that



customers have varied tastes, and servers need to be able to adapt.

The next wine went in a different direction. "You need those green notes that are the key to Grüner," Dufeu says as he pours Huber Grüner Veltliner Traisental 2010. With lime acidity and green apple fruit, it is the definition of a high-key Grüner. With it, black sea bass is served with Malvan sauce, cilantro, chile and coconut cream. The trick here is a good sear on the skin side of the



Left: Sliced duck breast in coconut, tamarind and Tellicherry pepper sauce is paired with aged California Cabernet at Junoon. Above: Sommelier Olivier Dufeu and chef Vikas Khanna

fillet. "The skin is an important element," says Dufeu, and indeed it is the savory grounding of the plate.

And the color match is just the beginning, with the cilantro and lime and apple flavors knitting together. But the coconut pulls a tropical aroma out of the wine, lightening the combination.

As we move to red wines, Dufeu provides a general rule to use "lower tannin, lower alcohol and a little age." Aromatics are key in the wine and the food, and a more complex and subtle wine will also show those qualities in the food. General manager Robin Lewis says, "Different people want different things. Some people want heat in the food mitigated; others want it ramped up. So the alcohol and acid depends on the diner." Dufeu's point is borne out by a Guy Bernard Côte-Rôtie 2000 poured with goat stewed in chile, tomato and yogurt. The wine has sweet cherry fruit and is subtle enough to let the layers from slow-cooking reveal themselves.

The match of the night is McKenzie-Mueller Cabernet Sauvignon Los Carneros 1999 and sliced duck breast with coconut, tamarind and Tellicherry pepper. The cool-climate Cab, with some age, is plush but still features smooth tannins. Again there is a faint, prickling heat balanced by tropical fruit, and again the relatively mellow wine provides liftoff. This time, however, the wine contributes more coffee and chocolate notes, which brings a nice depth to the pairing. —O.D.