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Manila dining perks up

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Midtown wants to reestablish itself as a landmark in the capital city, providing an exciting link to two of the city's oldest and most storied districts, Ermita and Malate

FOODIES WHO hang out in Ermita and Malate no longer need to feel "abandoned" despite the transfer of many of the districts' better dining places to Makati and other parts of Metro Manila.

Now they have a whole range of eateries to choose from—from fast food to almost fine dining—under just one roof.

About a third of the made-over Robinsons Place Ermita, particularly the new Midtown Wing, is occupied by restaurants, cafes and bistros that any one can practically go from breakfast to dinner, and snacks in between, by just taking a few steps and without getting out of the complex.

Midtown, which is also a residential development project, aims to breathe new life to the listless Ermita-Malate district, erstwhile hub of Metro Manila's night scene but had since relinquished the honor to sections of Makati and newcomers in Taguig and Quezon Cities.

Nilo Mapa, Robinsons Malls general manager, said, while the name harked back to an old Ermita landmark, the Midtown Hotel, it was also a reflection of what they hoped the complex would become—"the center of Manila."

Midtown's mix of establishments, particularly the lineup of dining places, was meant to cater to the varying needs of a diverse market like Manila's, Mapa said.

A bridge though Midtown is technically on the Ermita side, its main entrance opens to the Malate side. The design, according to Mapa, was just what the Robinsons group wanted because the establishment was meant to link up two of Manila's most storied districts, where the city's and the country's affluent, powerful and influential people used to live.

Still very much a work in progress, Mapa said Robinsons Midtown, which is under the supervision of Irving L. Wu, group property manager, would be "a new world of shopping, which offers a wide range

of dining options with an al fresco area, a lifestyle center, entertainment facilities [including] brand-new cinemas..."

At present, Midtown has some 20 food establishments. More are expected to open next month.

The 20 that have already set up shop include Chef's Quarter, Paseo de Bahamas Cafe & Tapas Bar, Gumbo, Penang Hill, UCC Cafe Terrace, Hotshots, The Old Spaghetti House, Banana Leaf Asian Cafe, C2 Classic Cuisine, Kulinarya Experience, Recipes Modern Asian Bistro, The Classic Savory Chicken, Tempura Japanese Grill, Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, Secret Recipe, Sucre Patisserie & Cafe and KKK.

Mapa said, in designing the layout of the new wing and making over the old side, the Robinsons Malls group wanted Midtown visitors, particularly loyal customers, to feel the difference without losing that sense of familiarity that made people patronize the establishment.