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Vinuls

international dining

THE TOKYO TAPAS TOUR

A Quixotian quest to find the best Spanish nibbles in town

BY JAMES HADFIELD

Tapas bars are so three years ago, our knowledgeable Japanese friend tells us. Why would you want to write an article about them now? Tokyo's foodies have shucked their short-lived obsession with these Iberian watering holes, recognizing them for what they too often are: jumped-up izakaya with higher prices.

That's a good thing, too. Though there's still plenty of chaff out there, the city's tapas scene has been whittled down since the mid-noughties boom, meaning that there are now fewer time-wasters on the dining circuit.

It would be nigh-on impossible to present a definitive guide to Tokyo's tapas bars, but it's fun to try. *Metropolis* spent a heady couple of weeks trawling through some of the best the city had to offer, following friends' recommendations like swine searching for truffles until we reached the point where the mere thought of another sangria or slice

of *jamón serrano* made us scream "Ay ay ay!" and run for cover.

Sorting the good from the bad isn't an easy exercise, requiring as it does a totally arbitrary set of rules that everyone else is bound to disagree with. Here are a few of ours: you shouldn't have to pay more than ¥500 for a slice of *tortilla* or a glass of house red; décor and ambience are almost—though not quite—as important as the grub; no bonus points for having Spanish staff; paying by the slice for bread is deeply, deeply uncool; ditto table charges in a standing bar.

Things began well with **Vinuls**, a vibrant little hotspot on a backstreet in central Ginza. There's a posh sit-down restaurant upstairs, but the main action is at the first floor bar, where *salarymen* and elegant shoppers spill out onto the street. The *tortilla de patatas* is a snip at ¥300, and most of the other tapas are priced at an eminently reasonable ¥500 (and no, that doesn't mean they're stingy with the portions). The wine comes in beakers rather