

It's 11pm in Gaucho Dubai and after drinks on the terrace, trio of masterclasses (ceviche, drinks, beef) and three courses to mark the Argentinian steakhouse's seventh anniversary, the evening is not quite over. We're taken through to the kitchen where Managing Partner Daniel Thomas shows us the engine room of the restaurant and shares his cooking and business insights.

In a city where F&B concepts change with the rising sun, Gaucho might qualify for museum status, a corner of stability amid capricious culinary tastes. So what's been its secret?

"We're not the bottles, champagne sprays and bright lights, we serve quality steak with good wine and service – it's basic really," says Thomas. "When the steak is ready, we will have it off the grill and at your table in 30 seconds. Most people think you should rest a steak – that's true with certain steaks, but it's not necessary with our wet-aged cuts."

We ate braised beef back ribs to start and the main course steaks which followed (fillet, sirloin, ribeye) were so tender they could be cut easily with an ordinary knife. I've eaten several business lunches here but not dinner and it was interesting to see the whole operation, and relax without one eye on the working clock. I discovered there is far more to Argentinian wine than red Malbec – as illustrated by the white Lujanita Malbec Mendoza 2016 – although a 'super Malbec' list is available, where the top bottle costs a cool AED5,500.

With its terrace, brunch and ladies' nights, Gaucho has more freedom here than in the UK, but it knows where to draw the line. "Some restaurants are making guacamole at the table – I understand the show and entertainment element, it's 'instagrammable', but simplicity and good product and service works for us."

It's a similar story at neighbouring Zuma and La Petite Maison, both corporate magnets and synonymous with consistent quality.

FRESH AND FAMILIAR

WORDS DOMINIC ELLIS

Dubai International Financial Centre's food scene is on the boil with a raft of new concepts – but few can rival its established haunts



ABOVE: La Petite Maison recently marked its eighth anniversary; Gaia is set to open in DIFC Village Gate Building 4.

But there have been a number of concepts which seemed strong on paper – Spanish fine dining La Luz (Chef Alain Devahive worked beside Ferran Adrià at 3-star Michelin elBulli for a decade), Totora Cebicheria Peruana, the upscale Mexican Peyote and Ceviche in Emirates Financial Towers – that didn't succeed. Previously Wheeler's of St. James from Marco Pierre White was another high-profile casualty.

The names keep coming. Imminent launches include New York's Marea restaurant (two Michelin stars), Gaia (high-end Greek/Mediterranean) and South African restaurateur Natasha Sideris will enter the space vacated by La Luz.

"When you are in Dubai you have a very limited time to produce regular guests, it's very important to make a positive first impression, and you have to be conscious of Ramadan and timings," said Thomas, who added that after a strong first two-and-a-half years, Gaucho "took a bit of a dip".

DANCE IN DIFC

Billed as 'the first nightclub on the Wall Street of Dubai', Mantis Dubai, located on the Podium Level of Emirates Financial Towers, looks the place to let your hair down after work. It spans a whopping 8,500sq ft and blends modern lighting, sound and digital technology.

Sharply off the corner and tucked away above the car park, you wouldn't say it's the most opportune setting, and even after all these years, the taxi driver didn't know where it was. But longevity proves that the proof really is in the pudding.

In recent few years, the ubiquitous drive towards casual has certainly impacted the top end, though Gaucho treads the line well, a classy setting which manages, through the terrace, bar and cellar, to blend smart-casual informality.

Though you could argue as the market becomes more casual dominated, venues which can retain a premium offering, without overpricing, will maintain their competitive edge.

Samantha Wood, founder of impartial restaurant review website *Foodiva.net*,

CIPRIANI DUBAI

Menu (pictured above)

Business lunch returns with a rotation of signature dishes including fennel and avocado with shaved Parmesan cheese; Spaghetti Alla Vongole and Seared Scottish Salmon with cherry tomatoes and capers; and round off with the signature Cipriani Vanilla or lemon meringue tart.

Where is it?

Gate Village Number 10

Price

Three courses for AED150

Contact

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LEFT: Braised beef back ribs at Gaucho Dubai.



said the DIFC restaurant district is saturated with new restaurants offering the same cuisine within steps of each other.

"Landlords should forbid same cuisine restaurants opening in the same building," she believes. "The original, long-established venues may be performing reasonably well given the saturation, as are licensed concepts and cafés that have entered at an affordable price point."

With the cost of living rising, the number one criteria for dining out now is price point, provided restaurants still provide excellent food, service and atmosphere. "Otherwise, with the rise of the Deliveroo culture, diners are choosing to stay in and enjoy restaurant quality food at home," she adds.

"This still benefits those restaurants to an extent, but at a high commission cost. Expense budgets for companies and business travellers have also been slashed, making the right price point crucial to the decision on where to dine."

CASUAL BITES

REFRESH DELUX CAFÉ

Menu

Healthy homegrown Mediterranean fare with ingredients sourced locally where possible. I enjoyed the seared crispy seabass (AED83) which was served on a bed of spinach and organic kale wild rice with a side of hand-cut, triple-fried fries with oregano. Greek Souvlaki, Lamb chops and burgers are also available. It's open for breakfast, lunch and dinner – a counter offers grab and go, or if you're chained to the desk, order online. Plans are afoot to open in Dubai Media City next year.

Don't miss

The carrot cake, a recipe from the owner's mother

Where is it?

You can't miss it, at the arterial crossroads on Level B1

Price

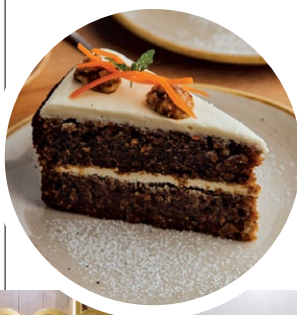
Affordable with dishes ranging between AED23-90

Contact

refreshcafe.com



ABOVE AND BELOW: Crab Market Dubai brunch at Emirates Financial Towers; Refresh Delux Cafe carrot cake and dining area.



BB SOCIAL DINING

Menu

New #secretmenu dishes have been created to mark its first anniversary this month. Diners simply need to either request the #secretmenu, or a particular dish they may have seen on social media, as follows:

- Bites section - Wagyu katsu; crispy tuna tartare; salt and pepper calamari; sea bream ceviche (AED55-120)
- Bao section – lamb kofta bao (AED55, pictured)
- BBQ section – wasabi lobster; barbacoa lamb; truffled rib-eye (AED125-195)

Don't miss

Wagyu Katsu

Where is it?

Gate Village 08

Contact

bbdifc.business.site

