

ADAM LLEVANT



For the Man
of the Middle East

CORPORATE LUNCH

BRAAI



The Venue

Drivers who have had the misfortune of sitting in their vehicle, stationary, while waiting for the traffic signals at Charles Malek Avenue and the

Sofil Centre to change in their favour may have noticed an oversized chair emblazoned with a mask-like design staring out from behind a glass plate window. Not unlike the 'Comedy and Drama' masks of Greek theatre, the

oversized chair, rather than signifying a theatre offering, is actually an indication of the decidedly large persona of braai's restaurant and lounge, in which it is positioned.

The venue's corner plot location in the Eclipse Centre, Sofil, coupled with spectacular floor-to-ceiling plate glass windows, ensure excellent urban-life vistas. The venue entrance is via the Eclipse Centre and being on such a demanding juncture, the valet parking is certainly convenient and required.

braai - a word with roots in South Africa, meaning 'grill' - has been well thought out design wise. The two-tiered venue encompasses the ground floor restaurant and a subterranean bar and cigar lounge, both of which are endowed with all the hallmarks of the Lebanese interior designer Bachir Nader. The interior itself is postmodern yet is devoid of the cold, minimalist and, at times, heartless design ethos that is more associated with a design look that is solely just the Contemporary school of thought. Instead, the interior manages to yield a certain warmth and comfort, while maintaining an impeccable stylish and twenty first century ambience.

With seating for seventy five guests on the ground floor, stainless steel is the material of choice that makes up some of the design elements in this area. Adorning the wall, for example, are circles which represent barrels that have been worked from stainless steel. The 'barrels' double as wine racks, thus creating a rather splendid and unique wine wall. The layout of the dining space enables diners to either secure privacy if need be, or secure a table where they can see and be seen. A bar completes part of one wall, which is further crowned by a rather delectable salad bar. A slight gap penetrates to the floor below, through which diners can glimpse the design decadence on the venue's lower floor.

The lower tier of braai is an accolade to interior design at its greatest. The dual space has been cleverly split, though not totally, by an elongated modern, living-flame fire 'wall'. The fire place is almost the complete





breadth of the room and adds a twenty-first century sense of chic to the setting. On the nearside of the 'fire wall' is the cigar lounge, or meeting area. A twelve-seater, leather Chesterfield sofa backs up to shelves, that have been designed to represent those usually found in a gentleman's drawing room, or smoking lounge, albeit with a flair of the twenty-first century. Six small tables are set in front of the sofa while some rather fabulously designed chairs - sourced from England - sit facing, the far wall is a spy-glass mirror which, with a flick of a switch transforms into television screens, thus creating an ideal setting for a seminar, meeting or just a gathering of refined gentlemen and where a cigar humidifier is available.

Beyond the unique fireplace is the bar area: a premium bar sporting labels that are unseen in other venues across Beirut. The space, though subterranean, is light and airy, which is thanks to the rather stunning design ethos including the exquisite Tom Dixon lighting found throughout the whole of Braai. The illuminated bar itself has been molded from corium with imported bar stools à la mode. The space is punctuated with tables and chairs whose design yield a retro feel. A 1978 Yamaha amplified piano takes pride of place and is from where melodies are channeled through the in-house pianist.

The Menu

braai may well mean 'grill' in the South African language, and indeed there are some menu items both in terms of the cuisine and drinks, that also point towards South Africa. However, braai is not a South African restaurant. It is, however, a steak house, albeit one with a difference.

Deep friend camembert, coconut prawns, crab cakes, sesame seed yellow fin tuna, baked stuffed Portobello



Hare, Oven-baked Pintade (South African guinea fowl), and Roe Deer, all depending upon the season.

braai makes for an ideal venue in which to lunch, be it a business meeting with clients or a lunch time break with colleagues: the ambience, the lunchtime offerings and the venue's location make sure of that. There is a daily lunchtime menu which presents a variety of choices. One choice is a Main, including Salad Bar and a Glass of House Wine. Lamb shank and roast beef, with Dragon Breath sauce.

Location

braai, Sofil-Ellipse Center, Achrafieh, Beirut, Achrafieh t. 01 333 901-902

Mushrooms Olive Tapenade are just some items that make up an delectable list of appetizers. Meat, naturally, features high on the Main's Menu and has been sourced the world over. Black Angus, both from the USA and Australia, are present. There is premium Argentinean meat too, as well as Australian Wagyu Beef. And though the restaurant is not South African, some South African cooking methods are used, for some of the menu items. A flame grill – not charcoal, for example – is utilized. Meat is brought in chilled, not frozen and is aged in the fridge for twenty one days. A number of sauces are South African inspired, Dragon Mouth sauce for example, which has been diluted for the Lebanese palette. Cote de boeuf, filet mignon, sirloin, rib eye and T-bone are all available. Excellent quality pork imported from France is also on the menu, and makes for a refreshing change, at least for pork lovers that is.

One surprising menu entry is the 'Game' section. Coming highly recommended, this menu changes each few months according to the South African hunting season and has a variety of

