

Let's have lunch

*Fusion and innovation are two key ingredients at Tel Aviv's popular **Messa** chef's restaurant*

• By JONATHAN GILAD

To invite someone to lunch is a great statement of friendship," wrote Jill Duplex, food editor and author, in her celebrated book *New Food*. She, of course, continues to give her wonderful recipes for making scrumptious lunch at home, but I decided to take a good friend for a wonderful lunch at one of Tel Aviv's most celebrated eateries, **Messa**.

Messa has maintained its position as a top meeting place for diners since it opened in 2004. The elegant white décor, comfortable seating and huge middle table still make it a very impressive location, but it is the chef's innovative cuisine that draws discerning diners to return again and again.

The creativity that comes from the kitchen of 38-year-old chef Aviv Moshe is expressed in every dish. He describes his cuisine as "an exciting dining experience that integrates culinary memories from my mother's kitchen." The menu constitutes an interpretation of his favorite popular dishes, combined with cooking techniques from Provence and southern Italy. The menu is based on fresh produce of the highest quality. **Messa** chef restaurant is the only Israeli restaurant to be included in the list of 80 restaurants worldwide on the *Condé Nast Traveler* Hot List.

Although he never had formal training, Moshe has earned great praise and respect from leading experts worldwide, such as renowned French restaurant critic Gilles Pudlowski, as well as positive reviews in global magazines.

"Most of my cooking secrets and techniques I learned and developed by myself when I lived in the Katamon neighborhood of Jerusalem, surrounded by neighbors from all kinds of ethnic groups. And Jerusalem is blessed with many kinds of herbs and spices that grow in almost every backyard," he says.

As a child, Moshe spent a lot of time in his grandmother's kitchen. "She doesn't use recipes, exact measurements or cooking gadgets. Watching her, I learned how to use North African spice mixes and ingredients. Coming to Tel Aviv, I started to use different products, and



now I try to combine the two to create my own cuisine."

The combination is evident in star dishes such as hrayme risotto and veal cheek with sweet spices (which is his mother's special dish).

"Like my grandmother, I believe that the most important spice is to put your love into every dish," he says.

As we sat on one of the comfortable white leather sofas, we were served a basket of freshly baked bread and an assortment of dips, such as eggplant, pickled Moroccan lemons and coriander vinaigrette.

Messa offers an extensive wine list from which we chose a glass of Bourgogne Chardonnay.

As we found it difficult to choose what to order, we surrendered to the chef, sat back and enjoyed his offerings.

For appetizers, we tried the seared portobello mushrooms served over corn polenta, tomatoes, Parmesan, truffle oil and a poached egg. It was divine. Next came winter sashimi of amberjack served with a salad of winter vegetables with Mediterranean seasoning and a piquant caramel dressing. It sounds strange but was very good. We also had the avocado surprise, with salmon tartare and an Asian mango-based sauce. All three starters presented a true fusion of tastes that somehow managed to make sense.

For the main dish, I had the fish fillet served with shallot ravioli and porcini butter, while my friend had tender lamb chops baked in a crust of focaccia and lemon butter, garlic confit and cream of chili, served with

a salad of fennel, avocado and celery. A perfect dish for an upscale lunch.

We were full and satisfied but had to have a taste of the desserts this restaurant is so famous for. Here, too, the fusion of cuisines was evident. The bogacha was a Balkan filo pastry filled with vanilla cream, served with pears cooked in red wine and saheb ice cream. The half-and-half cheesecake was made with classic baked cheesecake and a creamy cake in a white chocolate fondue. The third was a handsome strawberry dessert – layers of fresh and cooked fruit with crème pâtissière, meringue, almonds and ice cream served with macaroons.

It was a wonderful lunch, and around us we noticed a few famous faces from the business section of the newspaper transacting important deals, as well as loving couples out on their day off. We would definitely choose **Messa** again, especially for lunch when the prices are so much friendlier. The business lunch is NIS 88-108 per person.

The writer was a guest of the restaurant.

Messa Restaurant
Not kosher
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