

Lunch is Served Madam (Tagliata Fiorentina)

AGE editor Zanele Mlambo reports on her tasting of an organic meat recipe available from the summer menu at top eatery, Fumo.



GREEN SOCIAL

LUNCH IS SERVED *Madam!*

By AGE Editor, Zanele Mlambo

Why meat is a debatable subject in green living...

The Guardian reported on a study that concluded that meat rich diets (defined as more than 100g per day) resulted in 7.2kg of carbon dioxide emissions. In stark contrast, continued the study, both vegetarian and fish-eating diets caused about 3.8kg of CO2 per day and vegan diets produced only 2.9kg. Meat production is the main culprit, it states, particularly where beef is concerned. The popular red meat requires 28 times more land to produce than pork or chicken, 11 times more water and results in five times more climate-warming emissions. When compared to staples like potatoes, wheat and rice, the impact of beef per calorie is even more extreme, requiring 160 times more land and producing 11 times more greenhouse gases. (Source: An article on www.guardian.com, 2014)

I respect the scientific studies and findings but I believe food must be enjoyed. A person's diet is their own choice and is best left to every consumer to make a conscious decision – a decision taken based on health benefits or individual preferences. These matters are subjective by their very nature. Organic meat, however, is preferred as an alternative to non-organic meat and for this reason I included the recipe that this article is based on. A report stated that organic meat has some health benefits. The definition given was that organic meat refers to meat that is grown without the use of any chemicals, antibiotics, hormones or genetic modification. As a result, it minimises pollution and also promotes health.

Organic Recipe Tasting

I had a sit down with Claudio Uccello, Head Chef at one of the most welcoming and delightful eateries in Gauteng, Fumo, located in Groenkloof Plaza, Pretoria. He introduced me to the simple, no fuss recipe that left me wanting more "meat," excuse the pun.

The minute one enters this non-assuming Italian styled restaurant, you do feel you have arrived home – even before you have gone through the menu. As I made my way to my prepared seat, we chatted and he said that, growing up, preparing the family meal was the most important schedule of the day, hence his obvious passion for food preparation.

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“I watched Mamma and Nonna (grandmother) organise and schedule the daily meal,” Claudio explains, in his unmistakable Italian accent. “I was involved in growing our own vegetables, in a natural way, including preparing the tomato bottle and our own wines for all year,” he adds.

Claudio’s family owned a small piece of land in the region of Naples where his grandfather created all the facilities to grow their own produce. “Feeding people is an Italian culture,” Claudio tells me.

Of course, feeding healthy foods and caring for the origin of the meats sourced is one of the endearing aspects about the restaurant that I admired. Granted, there are various recipes that exclude meat and would be classified as “sustainable” or for some, as “green”, but we take what works. Meat can be produced responsibly.

As we chatted, I was secretly wondering what was in the dish we were waiting for. He had informed me there would be organic meat, but other than that, I was clueless as to what to expect. I am usually reluctant to try anything new in terms of food and, in this instance, Claudio had been a bit cagey about the “green recipe”. My imagination concocted some odd dish that probably didn’t have anything I am familiar with. I had thought the “green recipe” would turn out as an intricate, dull, non-meaty dish I would not have on any other day but this.

Food Presentation

The final presentation was magnifique or as the Italians would say, magnifico. I had medium-well steak made from organic meat, prepared with a special blend of olive oil, salt and pepper, and fresh herbs. Add some sundried tomatoes and parmesan cheese and you had a winner.

The Choice of Organic Meat

“It is very difficult to find organic prime meat,” said Claudio. Johan Pienaar is Fumo’s supplier and, according to Claudio, Pienaar’s meat is what is called Kalahari beef (Kalahari beef is 100% grass fed beef. It is farmed in the Vryburg region in the Northwest province of Southern Africa, under strict protocols that do not allow any grain, supplementation or chemical interference. The cows are only permitted to graze on the veldt, and the veldt is required to be rich, fertile and kept in pristine condition).

This particular cut of meat used in this recipe, had been matured at the right point, hence its scrumptious tenderness – just the way a steak should be prepared. Beyond the choice of meat, Fumo’s cooking technique makes the meat juicy and tasteful, without adding artificial flavours but using only olive oil, salt, pepper and fresh herbs. According to the standards stated, Kalahari beef is reared and handled differently and it contains no artificial residues.

The Fumo Experience

What I enjoyed about Fumo – beyond the obviously scrumptious dishes on offer and the pleasantly excellent service from the waitrons and managers alike – was the diversified composition of patrons that frequent this restaurant. I wanted to find out, as I was enjoying my steak, what Claudio believes is the characteristic that makes Fumo a delight to its customers, who return over and over again. “What I am trying to create at Fumo is an exchange of food culture and obvious social network that is a mixture of business and pleasure,” he answers.

The variety is what Claudio is happy about as we conclude our interview. “It is one of the few restaurants where a customer can experience the world all in one, from diplomats having sessions to business people discussing business over an authentic Italian (or sometimes European) meal,” he adds, beaming with pride, with a strong sense of modesty that is evident throughout our lunch session. It is not forced either.

I expected a glass of white wine to drink alongside my meal, however, in staying true to the adage, go big or go home, Fumo poured a cold glass of Veuve Clicquot Champagne. A perfect accompaniment to the simple yet delicious meal we were having.

This was a toast to the splendid time spent at Fumo with great company to match.

I glance over and before I even say another word, there is a waitron that is ready to take my order. In this instance, I had ordered take away margherita pizza for my two children.

There is no overstating the fact that it is not only the food that brings the people to this beautiful establishment, but the warmth, attention to detail in preparing the food – right from selecting what type of meats go into the menu – and customer service too, all of which form integral parts of the experience.

As I finish off my glass of champagne, Shannon, our amazing photographer, reminisces over Fumo's unassuming Italian look and feel. Let us not forget the delightful music that is playing in the background – Andrea Bocelli – just the perfect tone to a great lunch – whether business or not.