



## The cellar

*The new Claro restaurant in the Tel Aviv's new Saron Compound was a delightful surprise*

• By JONATHAN GILAD

Three years of planning and millions invested resulted in the new Claro – the first restaurant of one of the country's best known chefs, Ran Shmueli.

But restaurant is not a suitable name for the grand complex, housed in an old Templar building in the newly opened Saron Compound in Tel Aviv. The three story building, once a winery and distillery built in 1868, was beautifully renovated offering a large dining area on the ground floor, a private dining room on the second floor and a very impressive bar-lounge in the basement. All three areas, which can house more than 450 diners, are decorated with meticulous attention to detail, including specially designed furniture, some remnants of the original residents and many top-design features.

The cuisine is simple yet innovative, offering dishes that were inspired from countries around the Mediterranean, such as Spain, Greece and Italy, and of course many local Palestinian influences as well as Israeli home cooking, such as mafrum of Jerusalem artichoke and sea fish (NIS 85) and veal brain with polenta (NIS 75).

Entering the establishment, after receiving complimentary cold sangria, we were ushered to our table in the large sitting area and took our time looking around. We immediately decided that should we ever return –

we will choose to sit at the huge bar, which looked like the best seat in the house. Nevertheless, our table was very nice and we had a very knowledgeable and pleasant waitress who made the meal very enjoyable.

The menu is very straight-forward and relatively easy to understand, compared to many of the fashionable places in Tel Aviv. Everything on the menu looked good, but after many deliberations decisions were made and orders sent to the kitchen.

We started with warm fresh homemade ricotta, spinach, spiced tomato confit and grilled whole wheat brioche (NIS 45), and the obligatory ceviche, called here in the simple words raw Mediterranean fish, yellow-tail and freekeh (green wheat) tabbouleh, sorrel, mustard leaves and sour cream (NIS 54)

Both dishes were exquisite – fresh, light and very tasty.

Next, came duck and root vegetable tortellini, rosemary and smoked apples (NIS 64), which can be either a large starter or a small main dish. The pasta was fresh, handmade and lovely, the filling cooked as it should be, but what really made the dish perfect was the sauce – a red wine sauce that was very French and comme il faut, or in plain English – perfect. The kind you expect in a three-star French restaurant.

My companion felt like having a steak – and decided to choose the fillet (NIS 138) served with roasted potatoes and onions, hyssop and

pomegranate sauce – a perfectly good steak that satisfied his carnivorous needs.

Other dishes we looked at and decided to keep for another visit were the ricotta gnocchi (NIS 48) and the red wine and beef risotto (NIS 78).

We were very impressed with the vegetables and were told that the restaurant buys its fresh produce from an organic farm from the Galilee. It shows – in the flavor, freshness and variety.

Desserts here are prepared in a special open corner. We chose to take just one – a giant chocolate truffle, filled with many wonderful things. We loved it.

Prices are reasonable compared to other top restaurants in Tel Aviv, meaning around NIS 150 per person. The food is lovely, the decor amazing and the warm hospitality is a great big bonus.

There is a well-stocked bar and a selection of excellent cocktails. Top that with whole wheat freshly-baked focaccia bread, the best organic vegetables, seasonal dishes and well-prepared honest food, served in a beautifully-renovated historical building and you get – a winner, which we predict is here to stay. We will certainly be coming back soon.

*The writer was a guest of the restaurant.*

Claro

Not kosher

30 David Elazar corner of Ha'arbaa 23, Tel Aviv. (03) 601-7777. Daily 7 p.m. – last guest.