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## What's Cooking

RESTAURANT REVIEW | PUBLICATION - WHAT'S COOKING



*an attractive latin accent  
to the city's  
cosmopolitan language*

Could the diverse flavours of the vast South American continent find adequate expression within the environs of one single restaurant? What's Cooking brushed up on its magnificos and headed on over to Latino House to find the answer.

Conventional wisdom has it that the Latin sensibility will more likely than not veer towards being temperamental, hot-blooded and prone to the occasional mood swing. With that thought niggling away at the back of our minds, we ventured towards **Latino House**, the **Al Murooj Rotana's** flagship **South American restaurant**, a little bit hesitantly. Would we be greeted by a fiery waiting staff indulging in an impromptu game of 'who can fling the plate farthest', accosted perhaps by a masterchef intent on displaying grand gestures of his maverick genius?

Thankfully, those fears were put to rest almost the minute we were transported by golf cart up to the Rotana's invitingly secluded restaurant enclave, and ushered most gracefully via spiralling staircase within Latino House's plush yet pleasantly restrained interiors. With a cozy, intimate feel and soft, subdued lighting, initial impressions hinted at a place with class. The food that followed only served to confirm the suspicion.

While the **lobster & artichoke salad** tempted with its ingenuity, I opted for the '**burritos de pollo**' - **marinated chicken sautéed and wrapped in three flour tortillas** - as my hot appetizer. Warm, subtle and delicious to a fault, its relative dryness was negated by a splendid **guacamole dip**. My dining companion's starters, the '**selección de tapas**' were no less appreciated - the chef's recommendation coming up trumps on taste as well as presentation.

Eschewing Latino House's ever-popular **tenderloin black Angus and wagyu steak**, we chose to tread down slightly more adventurous paths for our mains. My companion's **jumbo shrimps with tempura mushrooms** drew wholesome praise from the first bite itself, its juicy fleshiness accentuated to perfection by a **cayenne pepper** and strangely successful **honey sauce accompaniment**.

Meanwhile, I was lost in a gourmand's dream of my own, the **Patagonia style rack of lamb** being the reason for my reverie. Served on a **bed of potato mille feuille** alongside **roasted pumpkin & caramelized onion** and served with **morel cream sauce**, this was an innovative lamb dish that ticked all the right boxes. Tenderness - check. Moistness - check. One satisfied customer - check.

The restaurant had begun to fill up quite nicely by then, which made it a good time to reflect on Latino House's overall impressions. **Chef Cesar Ramirez**, with previous stints in Chile and **London's Michelin-starred Mandarin Oriental**, hadn't allowed his Argentinian origins to overpower the menu. While that country, with its inherent Spanish, French & Italian influenced fare featured quite prominently across the selection, the restaurant managed to pay due homage to most of the continent without leaning heavily towards any one cuisine in particular.

**Peruvian cerviché, Mexican burritos, Colombian soups, Venezuelan mushroom delights** - the place certainly had Latin America covered, and authentically too, for good measure. With **sweet paprika, cumin, rosemary, parsley and thyme** perhaps being the only constants in what had been a fairly eclectic culinary journey.

Our evening ended with a triple treat - **a sinfully rich chocolate fondant, with a pistachio tuile by its side** and a **ravishing little red raspberry sorbet** to round things off quite memorably, gracias.

Through excellent food, knowledgeable yet friendly service, and a globe-straddling chef with enough expertise to ensure that the diverse food selection never got lost in translation, Latino House had made a solid case for yet another cliché to be added to the Latin American lexicon - that of inspirational cuisinier.

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