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Has Isaac Correa Finally Missed the Mark?

By The Moscow Times

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Ever since his days behind the burners of the hit fusion restaurant Ulei (back in the late '90s, when the words "hit" and "fusion restaurant" could be seen together), long-time expat and New York native Isaac Correa has been a golden boy of the Moscow dining scene.
The chain of mid-range family restaurants that carried his name has become such a fixture in the city that many Russians, he once complained to me, think his last name is actually "Correas."

As those who follow his exploits well know, he has moved on from Correa's and opened three new places in the last six months, none of them chains: the Upside-Down Cake Company, already known among sweets fiends for its banana pudding; Corner Burger, a mid-range burger bar that sits adjacent to Upside-Down Cake Co., near metro Belorusskaya; and, most recently, Black Market, a democratic family restaurant in the Khamovniki neighborhood.

Upside-Down Cake Co. seems to have developed something of a loyal following, which makes

sense given the dearth of true dessert places in the city; and in my limited experience eating there, the two-bite cupcakes and mini cheesecakes were worthy, if not mind-blowing. The reviews of Corner Burger have been more mixed, and my personal experience there (one dinner) was subpar, the burger being lukewarm and utterly tasteless. I've greatly awaited the opening of Black Market, though, because it seemed like the kind of concept Correa would realize impeccably.

But the other day, after excitement had been gradually building in me about making a trip there, I went to the restaurant's page on Afisha magazine's web site and was befuddled by something I saw: It had a rating barely over three stars out of five. Now, Afisha reviewers can, in my experience, be rather fickle — but three stars is unusually low. To compare, most locations of the cafeteria-style chain Mu-Mu receive more than three stars on Afisha; the kitschy chain Yolki-Palki often gets about three stars; and all the locations of restaurant Correa's have a solid four.

Then, I noticed a weak review of Black Market in the Element biweekly, where the critics are self-proclaimed devotees of most everything Correa does. The promised anchovies in a pasta dish were nowhere to be found; a shiitake soup came out tepid and oversalted; and the wait staff was sluggish and ill-tempered.

Could all the chilly reactions be justified? And if so, what's happened to the infallible Isaac Correa?

Have any of you, readers, been to his latest project? Please, share your experiences in the comments, and in the mean time, I will venture down there to investigate myself...

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