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Moregrill: Experiments in Culinary Matchmaking

Moregrill promises 'surf and turf,' but delivers sauces and small plates

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MOREGRILL / FACEBOOK

Moregrill hides in plain sight in a prime location on the corner of Kuznetsky Most and Rozhdestvenka streets. There is no sign advertising the one-month-old restaurant. Apparently, the owners exhausted their budget on "loft-style" lamps, wooden tables, even a rough-hewn marble sink in the bathroom.

The elegant décor jars somewhat with the macho "surf and turf" positioning of the establishment. The menu also offers surprises. Focusing on two opposite food trends, "raw" and "grill," its author Mark Statsenko had a different kind of contrast in mind when he

devoted the entire bill of fare to unusual pairings. Mysterious sauces accompany each dish.

The evening begins with a hiccup. The host calls to say that Moregrill can't serve wine without a liquor license, but that patrons are welcome to bring their own. One of the quirks of Russian "bring your own bottle" is that the patron should show the check for the wine, inadvertently informing the house of their wallet potential.

After Moregrill's host poured the wine, the scallop ceviche with passion fruit sauce (650 rubles) arrived. Its delicate jalapeno aioli teased the taste buds with a note of sweetness. The miniscule portion set in an oversized hunk of pottery was spicy, but not overwhelming.

Next, the crab, avocado cream and tomato (650 rubles) appeared, veiled by a tangy bed of lamb's lettuce. The greens revealed whipped avocado beside a mysterious magenta blend of beetroot and horseradish: "California — meet Moscow." When tossed, the salad exploded into a kaleidoscope on the tongue — its vivid contrasts changing with every bite.

The appetizer plates seemed a prelude to an even better main act. Unfortunately, at 2,600 rubles, the beef black angus fillet with homemade truffle butter seemed a bit much, so I selected the more modest halibut (790 rubles), curious what aioli sauce with orange might bring. What it brought was whitefish with mustard. Gobbling up the disappointment, I longed to replace it with the giant crab, still in its shell, visible on top of our neighbor's bowl of pasta (900 rubles).

The light fish course left some room for dessert. Or, should I say, for desserts. The adventurous trio of fondant with white chocolate (basically, a gooey brownie) showed up with green-tea matcha ice cream (350). Pairing a rich brownie with its fresh companion, unfortunately, gave the feeling that these two big personalities would be better enjoyed on their own.

But the baked pear, cloaking its warmth underneath a platter-sized wafer, captured the hearts. Lightly marinated in cherry syrup, the demure pear broke apart with the touch of a fork. Its partnering gorgonzola ice cream offset each ravishing slice.

Dining at Moregrill was a bit like witnessing a room full of culinary blind-dates: Some matches offer polite compliments, others repulse each other immediately. It's the rare dish that evokes love at first sight.

Despite its tough guy menu, Moregrill is really a tapas bar. Bring a date, or better, a group of friends — grab a bottle from the extensive wine selection , and enjoy the adventure.

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