

## IQ Wine Bar: A Test of Intelligence

The menu promised tapas and expert recommendations – but where was the sommelier?

By [Grace Watson](#)

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Serving affordable food and a selection of wines, IQ Wine Bar fills a niche in the Sokol area. **IQ WINE BAR / FACEBOOK**

IQ Wine Bar Boutique, a bar-cum-wine store nestled unexpectedly in a business park, lays its cards on the table from the outset. Empty bottles proudly line the windowsills, grapevines are stenciled on the walls, Cabernets perch atop dainty shelves. All of this sends a clear message: Our business is wine, and we take it seriously.

“Our staff is ready to recommend wine for any dish!” assures the menu. Despite its rather heavy-handed decor, this self-proclaimed “intelligent shop & bar” provides a pleasant ambiance for couples and groups seeking a bite or sip in a place that seems to care about wine.

There is plenty to eat as well. IQ serves primarily Mediterranean fare, like antipasti (280 rubles/\$5) and crab gazpacho (280 rubles), but also gravlax (390 rubles), escargot (400 rubles), Moroccan harira (300 rubles) and assorted cheeses (400 rubles). Bruschetta and budget-friendly bites run for 190 rubles a pop.

The tapas plate (380 rubles) is always a good introduction to the kitchen's range, and this one includes a rare treat: cheese-stuffed, bacon-wrapped dates. We also opted to try the bruschetta with muksun, a Siberian whitefish.

Inspired by the menu's enthusiastic declaration, we requested the waitress recommend a dry red to start off with. Startlingly, she admitted little mastery of the subject and scurried away, presumably seeking reinforcements. She eventually reemerged with Barefoot Zinfandel, a bottom-shelf wine I had become familiar with during my university years, sold here for a steep 1,500 rubles (\$26.50) a bottle.

I was confused: Where was this sommelier whose expertise the menu heralded? After some probing, we learned: "He's gone." At least this Monday, the work shift had ended before dinner time, leaving the staff ill-equipped in drinking matters.

The starters were meager, even given their democratic prices. The bruschetta was a humble affair—three thin slices of almost-crispy white bread, smeared with nondescript cheese spread, garnished with fish morsels and sprigs of dill. The scoop of orange-flavored caviar atop each one was a welcome rival to the otherwise bland softness, though it was too minuscule to provide a satisfactory dose of the zing it teased at.

The tapas appeared more impressive, but likewise were not group-friendly, as halving a spongy sliver of stacked potatoes is near-impossible. The roasted red pepper was flavorful, though detracted from by a needless bed of white bread. The dates were even a bit dry.

The mains, a handful of meat and fish-based dishes, intriguingly incorporate wine as an ingredient, mostly in sauces. The glazed salmon with bulgur and buerre blanc (590 rubles) was a fillet flanked by gentle mounds of glistening bulgur. The latter was satisfyingly butter-slicked, but the salmon was dry and lackluster, and while its accompanying sauce was creamy and smooth, it was somewhat drab.

Like the mains, the desserts include inventive wine notes, a final chance to shake the palate. The pear in red wine (330 rubles) hinted at long-awaited culinary inspiration. A burgundy-blushing pear fanned across the plate, its mealy sweetness cut by the acidity of the wine.

IQ fills a gap in its area, with affordable meals and snacks, as well as a decent selection of wines. Stop by and hope that you'll be served by the elusive experts. Otherwise, be prepared to resist turning up your nose when you see Barefoot served proudly to a nearby table.

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