

Butler: Sicilian at Your Service

Seafood classics from southern Italy await at this Ginza Project restaurant near Patriarch's Ponds

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Butler offers innovative contemporary variations on dishes from Sicily. **BUTLER / FACEBOOK**

With Butler, a recent offering of the ubiquitous Ginza Project, Chef Giuseppe Davi brings his contemporary interpretations of Sicilian classics to the fashionable Patriarch's Ponds area.

The dining space occupies a two-story mansion and sprawls out lavishly onto a peaceful, spacious veranda. Well-heated and awning-covered, it's not hard to imagine either a date or a meeting here, no matter the weather. The interior has a cozy feel, with historical touches – architectural molding and shelves crammed full of books — though you may find it has been reserved for a private party.

Saturday diners included both silent patrons plugged into bluetooth headsets and young ladies having apparently traded their yoga mats for stilettos, all here for the pleasures of wine

and pasta.

Butler's website promises seafood and Sicily, done up with innovative accents, from grapefruit to potato foam. As we waited, we were brought small nibbles of tomato and baba ghanoush topped with cheese foam, compliments of the kitchen. Such touches always help in making guests feel welcome. We were also given a good reception by the very attentive staff — who at times were a little too attentive. Waiters and waitresses kept swooping by to remove menus still in use, which became a bit of a comical relay.

Considering the carefully cultivated ambience around us, it came as quite a surprise when the classy music that had been lulling us deeper into our plush chair cushions suddenly gave way to a few violent pulses of indistinguishable syllables – mic check, as it turned out. What followed was an incongruous, karaoke-style performance of popular hits, ranging from Bon Jovi to Daft Punk. The sophistication level having plummeted so rapidly, we hid our chuckles as the eager waiter returned, bearing food.

The assortment of tuna, snapper, and red Sicilian shrimp tartare (1,300 rubles/\$22) came with passion fruit and basil dust toppings — an intriguing addition. Though small, the trio was an elegant and fresh opening to the heavier plates to come. Paired with an ample basket of warm, crusty breads given upon request, we were well taken care of while waiting for more.

Deciding the next direction was a slight challenge, since Butler offers a number of pasta, meat, and fish options. Certain I wanted to continue on the promised seafood route, but also curious as to what their purportedly hand-crafted pasta had to offer, a happy combination presented itself in the sea bass bottoni with crudaiola sauce and red shrimp (850 rubles).

The pockets of pasta were plump with fish and, unexpectedly, black — maybe that's the innovative accent, here — offset by fresh tomato sauce. Spaghetti aglio e olio with anchovies and sun-dried tomatoes (780 rubles) was supposed to be served al dente, but this was taken a bit too far and the spaghetti would have benefitted from another minute of cooking time. That said, the dish was balanced and bright but hearty.

We had planned to try out a main after the pasta courses, but the carbs were so filling that we instead went straight for sweets. Always tempted by a boozy dessert, I settled for the Limoncello Baba with Strawberry Sorbet (520 rubles). The small cake was exquisitely moist, and the presentation was quite a spectacle — it was stuffed with whipped cream and the entire plate adorned with a playful stripe of cereal crunchies.

On this occasion, alcohol consumption was confined to the dessert course, but there's no doubt that those wishing to imbibe can find something to their taste here. Whether dry or with drink, Butler is a welcome addition to the neighborhood, treating with admirable delicacy a cuisine that is all too often taken for granted.

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