

Gourmet

Secrets of Sri Lanka

Barcelona is well-known for its gastronomy and for its secrets. Bring these two ingredients together and you've got yourself a Supper Club.

The Supper Club finds its roots in the United States back in the Jazz days of the 1930s. The idea being that people can have dinner whilst enjoying live music.



Today it is also known as the 'guest restaurant' and is finding great popularity across Europe. Just recently the British news paper the Sunday Times printed an article listing London's top ten Supper Clubs, they also named the chefs behind the creations and what the discerning diner could expect to eat.

In the rest of the Europe the trend is on the increase but still has a way to go. The fact that restaurants in Spain hold 134 Michelin stars and provide excellent cuisine means that Supper Clubs are still relatively new to the city and have taken a while to catch on.

The concept of Supper Club dining is simple. You are 'invited' by the chef to a pre-determined location (usually organized via the internet) where you dine according to a preset menu this usually includes wine and coffee..

The whole arrangement has a more intimate feel, more like a dinner party than restaurant dining. The only difference being that you pay for the service. In London Supper Club competition is fierce. Many chefs are trained professionally with experience of working in Michelin starred restaurants.

The Mount Lavinia Supper Club began after Barcelona resident of twelve years and chef Faraaj became disillusioned with Asian food in the city "The culture of Asian food in Barcelona tends to be modified or diluted to the Spanish palette. I really want to give the city real Asian food as you would eat in anybody's house in Sri Lanka without holding back on taste or on spice" says Faraaj. The very name Mount Lavinia comes from a strip of coastline south of the capital Colombo, well-known for its beauty, beaches and seafood.

The spice trade significantly influences Sri Lanka's cooking and this remains the same today. Many of Mount Lavinia's spices come from Sri Lanka and Italy whilst some are purchased from specialist shops around Barcelona. The combination of Sri Lankan food is inspired by several different ethnicities. Quite a few periods of colonization are responsible for the exotic cuisine, blending indigenous ingredients and cooking techniques with influences from, Portuguese, Dutch,

Indonesian & Malay cooking and a host of other world food traditions.

Mount Lavinia's supper club or "curry corner" as Faraaj likes to call it depends on him being able to shop and cook the food personally to ensure quality. "This is something I could never do in a restaurant. Not only do I bring people together at my dinner table, I educate them. I open their eyes and taste buds to a whole new experience; in short I bring Sri Lanka to Barcelona". The very idea of it brings to mind the separation of food preparation and art. "Cooking for me is painting a picture. I could never allow anybody else to pick up my paints and easel and take over". He prides himself on maintaining high standards. Meats and vegetables are sought out and shopped at La Boqueria or El Mercat de San Antoni. Every ingredient is meticulously researched. Preparation and execution from the market to the table are deeply personal things for Faraaj and crucial for Mount Lavinia.

His Supper Club menu consists of beef or chicken cooked on a slow fire with a mix of ginger, coconut milk and a base of curry.. Tuna cooked in a mix of tamarind mildly baked in a banana leaf and Mountlavina's signature plate: A Sri Lankan delicacy, chili crab. Cooked in an onion sauce with Sri Lankan favorite, Pol Sambole, a grated coconut mixture with onions and chopped green chilies with lime.

Mount Lavinia is in no way alone. The Supper Club global network is vast. Several internet pages are dedicated to the underground dining experience such as (supperclubfangroup.ning.com) probably the most up to date and authentic list of supper clubs worldwide. Barcelona is still yet to find its footing even though the city stands as a beacon to creativity and innovation; the network is some way behind New York, Chicago or London.

The phenomenon is quickly developing throughout Europe. Some Supper clubs and clandestine establishments are secret dining societies, only those within the exclusive group can dine at their restaurants. One of Britain's most successful and sought out supper club chefs, Ms Marmite Lover. when asked about her success simply replied, "We thought we just wanted to do it as an experiment, but it just took off without us putting much effort in and it just spiraled."

There is no way of knowing the true number of supper clubs in each city, some are born and die all in a single night. Some are such a well-kept secret that only those in the know can take the secret to the dining table.

www.mount-lavinia.com/Homechef.html

supperclubfangroup.ning.com

Text: Anthony Bain