



Deep fried artichokes at Stella e Luna



Big Bad Wolf at Wolfpack

PICTURE: RISHAV NAIR

New kids on the block

Parkhurst has hip new restuarants

HAVE a love-hate relationship with Parkhurst. I love the street vibe: quirky restaurants intermingled with quaint boutiques, inviting passers-by to window shop. There's something special about walking down a street like this in the sunshine, unaware of what treasures you may stumble upon.

In recent years, Parkhurst's popularity has skyrocketed, with a number of new restaurants and stores sprouting up along 4th Avenue, many of these part of larger franchises. Sadly, with popularity comes commercialism. You should consider yourself lucky if you manage to find parking on a Friday night, and don't even attempt to show up at a restaurant without a reservation. You'll most likely end up parking a few streets away, and have to hobble down the hilly pavement to get to your chosen restaurant. Similarly, prepare to queue for up to an hour if you want to eat at one of Parkhurst's popular breakfast spots on a Sunday morning.

However, regardless of waiting

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times, Parkhurst has two new gems that are definitely worth a visit.

STELLA E LUNA

Pizza lovers will be familiar with Cornuti, situated in Illovo. I like to think of Stella e Luna as its less uppity, trendy younger brother. Owned by the same people, Stella e Luna offers an excellent pizza with a side of tapas. The intimate restaurant has a beautiful ambiance, with a warm, inviting feel resulting from the lowered ceiling and eye-catching light fittings. I quite enjoyed the variety of seating options; this adds a new dimension to the restaurant. Guests have the option of sitting at the bar, in a corner booth, or at a table – inside or outside. The “no reservation” policy combined with

the buzz a newly opened Parkhurst spot emits, mean a wait for a table is likely. We waited at the bar for 45 minutes; after 30 minutes, we were given some complimentary tapas to munch on: a nice gesture.

I didn't realise that I actually like artichokes until I tried Stella's version. Crumbed, seasoned and deep fried – these golden balls were delicious, more so after being dipped in tartar sauce. We also enjoyed some focaccia with an assortment of dips – my favourites being the aubergine and coriander dip, as well as good old hummus.

There's a large variety of pizzas on the menu, priced R80 to R110. I'd recommend going in a group and ordering a few different pizzas, as well as some tapas – that way you get to taste a little of everything.

I tried the Judas Special, R82, with marinated brinjals, roasted red peppers, black mushrooms, feta, chilli and garlic. It was the first time I'd had a pizza with toppings so flavourful that they could have easily been eaten on their own. The base was thin and crispy, with just the right texture. My husband also raved about his choice – the Pizza Portugese, R86, with chorizo sausage, roasted peppers, sundried tomatoes and olives.

We were too stuffed to indulge in dessert, as enticing as the options sounded. Next time I'll skip starters and try the tiramisu, R45, or sticky toffee Amaretti pudding, R48.

Stella e Luna is at the corner of 12th Street and 4th Avenue, Parkhurst. Call 011 447 0669.

THE WOLFPACK

I have to admit, I was a little distraught when I found out that one of 4th Avenue's institutions, George's on 4th, would be closing to make way for a craft beer and burger joint, owned by the same people behind Craighall's Cnr Café.

We arrived to a packed restaurant on a Tuesday evening, and were shown to our table. I ordered a still water, and was surprised when the waiter told me they had run out. Now, I completely understand if a restaurant runs out of something like truffle oil, but surely, still water is a staple? Nevertheless, I opted for a cocktail instead, and soon we were happily enjoying our drinks while soaking in the restaurant's vibe.

The interior is very unusual: outside, wooden blocks take the place of tables, while inside, the combination of facebrick walls and tin chairs huddled together, offer a rustic but charming ambiance.

Service was extremely slow, but understandably, the restaurant was still getting used to catering for a full house. The burger menu offers a refreshing twist on what one usually expects. I'm used to having a choice between salad and chips with my burger, so I was really impressed to see a wide variety of salads available, like Asian salad with red cabbage, julienne carrots, toasted sesame seeds, basil and bean sprouts. You even have a choice of fries, including shoelace fries with garlic aioli, or sweet potato chips with hummus.

In terms of the gourmet burgers, in addition to the usual beef, there are vegan, veggie, ostrich and chicken options. We tried the ostrich burger: gourmet ostrich patty, served on a vetkoek with watercress, baby spinach and rocket, topped with blueberry reduction, avocado, toasted almonds and drizzled with feta dressing, R79, as well as the Big Bad Wolf – cheddar-stuffed gourmet beef patty, pan finished in tomato stock, topped with wasabi onion rings, jalapenos, pineapple, pancetta, fresh tomato and garlic aioli.

Although the burgers sounded very enticing, we found them much smaller than the Wolfpack's closest competitor, Duke's in Greenside. Burgers were also a bit dry, and took ages to arrive.

For dessert, ice cream is the only option, with just three flavours to choose from (one of which was out of stock). We tried the pistachio, halva and honeycomb, R40, which was delicious.

I'm not quite sure if the Wolf Pack lives up to its hype, but perhaps the restaurant just needs a bit more time to get used to the demand.

The Wolf Pack is at 21 4th Avenue, Parkhurst. Call 011 447 7705. Note that reservations are not accepted on weekends.

For more restaurant ideas, visit Hasmita's blog: www.joziliciousblog.co.za

Hasmita was hosted by the restaurants above for the purposes of this review.

Learning to make sushi is enough fun for date night

HASMITA NAIR

I'M BEING perfectly honest when I say I refused to even go near sushi before I went to my first sushi class at the Hilton Hotel.

The idea of raw fish completely put me off, but after seeing exactly how it's made, I was able to truly appreciate the taste combination and freshness of the finished product, and I haven't been able to get enough of the stuff since.

I crave the taste of wasabi, burning all the way through my nose and making my eyes water.

Now sushi lovers can learn how to make their very own California rolls, maki rolls, hand rolls and even

rainbow rolls. The Lotus Sushi and Teppanyaki Bar at the Hilton runs a sushi school every Friday night, with an advanced school on the last Friday of the month.

The class is limited to 12 people, keeping things intimate. The two-hour event is quite social – rather than quietly focusing on your own work, you'll be laughing at that of the person next to you.

Each guest is given their own set of sushi tools and ingredients, and at each class you make four different types of sushi, guided by the Hilton's experienced Sushi Master's demonstration, eating as you go along.

You'll end up with way more than you can possibly eat in one night, so

takeaway boxes are provided.

Sushi School is priced at R330 for a beginner's class and R550 for an advanced class.

This includes a welcome drink, complimentary dessert, chopsticks and a certificate.

The upmarket feel of the Hilton, combined with the fun you'll have at the class, make this an ideal choice for date night.

Bookings essential. Call 011 322 1888 or e-mail Jolanda.Vanwyk@hilton.com

Win a beginner's sushi class for two people by visiting Hasmita's blog: www.joziliciousblog.co.za

Hasmita was hosted by the Hilton for the purposes of this review.



Sushi School

PICTURE: RISHAV NAIR