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Outlet 360: Catch Abu Dhabi

Shaheen Nouman, June 29th, 2015

Royal Catering's Catch brings the flavours and feel of the sea to life, as Shaheen Nouman discovers

Front of House

Abu Dhabi-based Royal Catering opened Catch Restaurant and Lounge Abu Dhabi in January 2015. A quintessential seafood venue, the aquatic vibe stretches beyond the menu to the interiors and design. Assistant operations manager David Exposito says that the idea "just felt right".

He says: "It was conceptualised with a focus on the heritage of Abu Dhabi and the ocean; as we are surrounded by the sea, having a seafood restaurant seemed like the right thing to do. It is a fine dining venue, with a contemporary touch, orientating itself in the Far East with a few Middle Eastern influences."



Exposito doesn't think the general mind-set shift from fine to casual dining in the region will affect the brand, and says that with the selection of food and wine it offers, the venue will attract the crowd it is aiming for. However, the concept relaxes slightly in the day time. "During the day for lunch, the fine dining concept is not that strict. We offer sharing portions and encourage customers to try it; evenings are an entirely different scene."

Located at the Nation Riviera, overlooking the sea on one side and Corniche on the other, Exposito says the reason behind launching in Abu Dhabi was because it is the company's hometown, and the firm is "committed to the location".

Talking about how the restaurant will stand out from its competitors, Exposito says: "The individuality and creativity of chef Roudy [Petersen] is what sets us apart. Also, it is quite a well thought-out concept."

Another element that sets Catch apart is the interiors; it's inspired by mother-of-pearl, and embodies the strong maritime and pearl diving tradition of the region in a modern, swank and rich décor.

"It is very contemporary, sleek and chic. It is modern without being cold. It is a place where you feel welcomed all day round." He points out the contrasting materials used, from marble to driftwood, to create a fine dining venue with a hint of cosiness, created by LW Design.

Exposito says all the elements of the restaurant were carefully planned, with involvement from Royal Catering, including the music. The two in-house DJs create a playlist for the restaurant, with deep house influences, which is vibrant during the day and mellow at night.

The beachfront restaurant can seat 115 people inside, and an additional 60 on terrace. Weekday covers range from 60 to 80, whereas weekend covers exceed 100.

Going forward, Catch plans to host exclusive dinners, and seasonal menus; however, expansion plans and/or franchising the concept are not being entertained just now. Exposito says Royal Catering has launched a number of concepts recently and will focus on those. "We will be happy to expand and fly our concepts to other regions as well, but just not now."

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Back of House

Roudy Petersen is at the culinary helm of Catch, having started with the brand in November 2014, bringing more than 14 years of experience to his new role. He entered the Middle Eastern market with St. Regis Doha two years prior to this, where he also worked with Gordon Ramsay on his restaurant.

While Catch offers seafood, his signature cuisine is French, and he intends to fuse them together. "I try to use the basics of the French cuisine and work with international products. We have Asian fusion and seafood, with

an à la carte, lounge and bar menu. It was challenging for me in the beginning.”

Commenting on whether he will tweak the flavours for the local palate, he says: “When you move around the world, you learn to work for the local palate. I keep my classic style of cooking and build on to it as per what the clientele is looking for.”

Petersen is new to the emirate, and did not create the menu until after a lot of research. “Once I arrived in Abu Dhabi, I ran a check on the market’s DNA, who are my competitors, and what the local market is looking for. And then we started.

“This is why I can say that Catch offers a very special type of cuisine. Also, we have chefs from all over, including China and Thailand, and we combine our expertise and experience to create something special.”

The kitchen has 50 chefs, and the restaurant operates with 46 service staff and 20 more for the bar.

When it comes to sourcing ingredients and produce, Petersen is quite happy with the situation. “The market in Abu Dhabi is quite large, so it is easy. We have a large variety of suppliers and our products come from around the world, like Europe, Japan and Thailand. It is easier to find products in Abu Dhabi than in Doha — you can have whatever you want in terms of products.”

Around 60% of the ingredients are sourced from international suppliers. It also works with local suppliers whenever possible, and sources ingredients like proteins and seafood, from the region.

Explaining the menu engineering at Catch, Petersen says: “We analyse best-sellers and slow-moving items, identifying what customers are looking for. We get a report every month and update the menu accordingly; best-sellers stay and slow-moving items are either altered or replaced.” He adds that the à la carte menu will change thrice a year, with approximately 40% new dishes.

Petersen’s contribution to Catch is not limited to the kitchen; he says: “We need to understand finances, and know how to run a business. We also need to keep an eye on the staff, their productivity, cooking method and procedures, wastage and cost of items being cooked.

“For example, we use a lot of shellfish and have almost 40% wastage. So we try to use it in some way, maybe a soup. And it becomes a profitable seller. We try to minimise the wastage, and a chef needs to know this, and how to run the daily operations and manage food costs.”

Along with constant reviews of the menu to bring together the best-sellers, instilling highest service standards amongst the staff is a priority for near future for Petersen.