The art of hospitality: reap what you sow (and bake, make and brew)

The basics of being a good host: start in the home or a well-equipped Finnish classroom. Monocle gets a few lessons from battle-hardened GMs and some charming ambassadors. A new MONOCLE SPECIAL

The Hospitality Rule Book
1. Focus on the details
2. Lead from the front
3. Be authentic
4. Hire staff based on potential, not credentials
5. Speak with a consistent tone of voice
6. Turn the lights down
7. Figure out your signature soundtrack
8. Avoid fads and trends
9. Keep your plates and bowls round
10. Old school is more welcoming than new school

Learning needs to be hands-on and head-down

I'm part of a new generation that can actually...

The Hospitality Rule Book

...run a household, lend a bar and mend uniforms

AT YOUR SERVICE

1. THE FINEST EMBASSY
Putting on a convincing event for esteemed guests requires exemplary decision-making

2. THE SMARTEST AIRLINE
The well-designed airport lounge that makes you pray for a long delay

3. THE TASTIEST CHEF
Ruth Rogers of the River Café describes the menu for her perfect ‘last meal’
Rare talent
Lisbon

Preface
Portuguese chef José Avillez is singing the praises of a simple classic - steak - at Café Lisboa, his restaurant in the city’s opera house.

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Finding a perfectly cooked steak in the Portuguese capital can be tough, as many restaurants’ menus revolve around fish and pork dishes. But the fact that beef isn’t Portugal’s strong suit hasn’t stopped one of the Iberian nation’s best chefs from dedicating his third restaurant to perfecting it.

“Three centuries ago, Lisbon was among the cities that used to serve the most steaks in the world,” says José Avillez (pictured, above), one of Portugal’s most prominent authorities on the country’s eating habits. “We had tabernae and cafes where artists and writers would get together and talk, have a drink – a coffee or eat a steak. I wanted my restaurant to bring back this tradition in some way.”

Café Lisboa is in the central neighbourhood of Chiado and the restaurant shares a building with the city’s opera house, the Teatro Nacional de São Carlos.
Recipe

Prawns with garlic and chilli
Serves 4

Ingredients
450g medium prawns, cleaned
20g garlic, thinly sliced
3 seeded red chillies, finely sliced
Olive oil
Salt

The method
1. Heat olive oil over low flame in a non-stick frying pan.
2. Add thinly sliced garlic and chillies. Stir.
3. Add prawns and fry lightly, turning so they cook evenly.
4. Season with salt to taste. Serve immediately.

It's a fitting host considering Avillez's appreciation of the classics. "We restored all the interiors, from replacing the gold leaf on the walls to installing a new bar. The restaurant is only a year old but it looks like it has been unchanged for centuries," he says. Despite the building's age, the atmosphere is far from old-world and interior-design studio Ana Jorães's flourishes provide a sense of freshness. There is also an outdoor terrace that draws a diverse lunch and dinner crowd throughout the week.

Steaks are the forte here and each is made from tenderloin beef from the Charolais cattle bred in France, before being cooked sous vide the day before service with one of six different sauces.

Beyond its beef, Café Lisboa has brought back a few emblems from the capital's culinary past. "It took me three or four years to develop the recipe for our custard tart," Avillez says. Although the restaurant serves bacalhau à Brás (shredded cod, onion and potato with olives) and beef croquettes with turnip-topped rice, these staples have become unfashionable and increasingly hard to find elsewhere in Lisbon. "We have developed new techniques of preparing these traditional recipes, as we have with our steaks, which rest an hour after slow cooking before being reheated bain-marie style and then tearoomed [cooked on an iron griddle] for a couple of minutes," he says.

"Our kitchen is small and very busy with up to 100 people being served in an hour sometimes," adds Avillez. "So when we conceptualise our menus it takes a long time for us to develop ways not only to produce plates but to deliver them as best we can in the restaurant." — (M)
cafelisboa.pt