



### **Whatever they're paying these guys, it isn't enough.**

'Fine dining' is a concept that presupposes quality service, excellent cooking, superior presentation, and a premium on the bill to pay for all of that. More important, though, it's about reputation; no restaurant which aspires to 'fine dining' can survive on passing trade. It needs potential punters to hear about the place, to make the trip, to come again and to tell their friends to come there too. That's why Bord Eau's manager Nicholas Socquet and chef Gilles Perrin deserve every fil they make.

Bord Eau is basically a modestly-sized room off the Shangri-La's huge foyer, seating just 45 people some of whom will be on the terrace outside looking towards the Grand Mosque and the cranes. It's barely signposted from the lobby, and that discreet confidence is mirrored throughout the meal.

First impressions are spot on: a generous welcome at the door, a room that has enough luxury to convince but is not over the top, tables spaced widely enough for privacy, very good cutlery and china. You'll probably get Nicholas to welcome you and talk you through the menu, and in a French restaurant it's reassuring to know that there's a French manager (the chef is Swiss, but he's from the French-speaking part of Switzerland and cooks like a true son of Escoffier). You're made to feel very welcome, and in the right way – meaning there's no gushing, no unnecessary obsequiousness. He just seems genuinely pleased to see you in his restaurant. This is real professionalism.

The menu and the cooking match that. It's a relatively short menu, which means the food can

be fresh and cooked to perfection without the need to run a hectic slam-bang kitchen or to maintain an over-full cold store of possible content. The style is classic old-school French with a contemporary twist; in particular, there are no mighty sauces muscling in to take over the plate – the cooking is deceptively simple, with the main item typically cooked quite quickly but served with a reduction or a side-item that has obviously taken a lot of preliminary work.

It's all about design: what goes well with what, how it feels to the eye as well as to the palate – though perhaps primarily to the palate. Gilles' food tastes simply fabulous.

That's one reason why the taster menu is one of the best possible choices here. Five dishes, not over-large but in total a good filling meal; and there's enough flexibility here for the chef to offer ten different items to the two of us.

So, some highlights: lobster and artichoke was a mouth-watering starter, and so was the prawn with *salade à la Grecque* on an inspired puddle of cauliflower cream. A small fillet of sea bass was pan-fried very simply but came with a courgette flower stuffed with very winey beef mince that must have taken a while to prepare. The other fish dish was a piece of cod with parsley mayonnaise, *salsa verde* and asparagus. Where possible the chef goes to France for ingredients and the lamb comes from Quercy, a region of la France Profonde that produces the tenderest example. The Angus beef fillet is Australian but had been aged very well and cooked even better; with them we had a rich and aromatic truffle-infused mash.

For dessert the chef produced a mini chocolate bombe with edible gold leaf and a neat trick – hot chocolate sauce was poured over it to melt the casing a bit. The fruit parfait was fresh and tangy.

It's clean, pure cooking with style, a real respect for the ingredients and culinary craftsmanship that goes beyond the ordinary. Respect for the paying customer was also much in evidence, with good but unfussy service throughout. My guest said it was one of the best meals she'd ever had – ever! –and it was hard to disagree.

We had to work hard to find a criticism, but here it comes: the dessert choice could have had a bit more palatecleansing acidity on offer, maybe a lemon or lime option. And that's it.

**What?** Bord Eau

**Where?** Shangri-La

**How much?** AED 350 per person

**Why?** Could be the best fine dining in town

**Why not?** Well, it's not cheap, especially if you have a drink

**Rated:** 9.5/10

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