

Eating Out

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The places to dine in Bahrain plus culinary tips for the food connoisseur



The art of fine cuisine

SOMETIMES you crave a sensation that satiates all of the senses. Umami restaurant in Adliya aims to satisfy that desire with its regal setting, aromatic assortment of Asian cuisines and vivid works of art.

The name 'Umami' is a Japanese word that means 'fifth flavour', a pleasant and savoury one that accompanies the other major flavours, including sweet, sour, bitter and salty. It is one that cannot be explained, but knows how to appease any appetite. The name was thoughtfully chosen by one of owner Momen Khandakar's daughters, 29-year-old Goldie.

The restaurant offers an assortment of Asian cuisines and when I don't know if I want Szechuan stir-fry drizzled in soy sauce, juicy grills or a dash of hot masala, I know that I can find that delicate balance of international spices and sauces at Umami.

It was only right that I share that joy with the members of my *GulfWeekly* team, because some things are just too good to keep a secret.

"The whole idea of the restaurant involves the mind, soul and heart. I don't want to have people just come and eat; I wanted to create a space for the mind and body and that is why I wanted to develop Umami as a place of art and culture," said Umami's owner, Momen, who also has restaurants in Saudi Arabia and England.

Upon entry, there were dazzling crystal chandeliers with burgundy and gold-trimmed ceilings, all of which offered an opulent and stately feeling. A sharp, jet-black piano was positioned in the corner and soft music played in the background



GOURMET REPORT
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and accompanied our lively lunch chatter.

The restaurant also had the feeling of an elegant art gallery. Momen, who is also an architect, musician and artist, displayed his vibrant oil paintings wall-to-wall in the restaurant. The flavourful fare that followed added another creative dimension of sights, scents and sounds.

"As an architect, I designed every part of the restaurant, from the tiles to the ceiling, from scratch. And there will be more innovation, charm and dazzle added in time," said Momen.

The art and architecture make this restaurant an original experience because of the owner's creative strokes, which are showcased from wall-to-wall. While the paintings are quite alluring, the diners here fall in love with the place because of its fine fare.

Our waiter, Delowar, greeted us with a friendly smile, black suit and bow-tie and attended to us throughout the lunch hour. The food was prepared by the disciples of Chef Leeang and Chef Sebastin Rozario, who provided us with the mouth-watering flavours of Mainland China and north India.

Delowar started by serving us crispy, light disc-shaped papadum or 'papad', which is seasoned dough made from black gram (urad flour), fried or cooked with dry heat.

The appetiser was complemented with a sweet, tomato-garlic sauce and my personal favourite, a thick coriander, chilli and mint chutney. Ryan Bayona, our photographer, smiled with glee at the sight of one of his favourite treats.



Photographs: Ryan Bayona

TASTY DISH: The seafood steamboat soup served in a hot pot

While one sauce kicked up the heat, the other cooled it down and both were lovely juxtaposed against the crunchy goodness. I washed mine down with a smooth and creamy fresh mango juice and that itself was a heavenly start to the meal.

The papad was filling, but there were three more appetisers on the way, including a vegetable spring roll so tasty that it burst with a colourful rainbow of fresh veggies and ginger, as well as hot and golden fried prawns with chips and tartar sauce. One of my favourites was the seafood steamboat soup, which was served in a hot pot and tasted similar to Tom Yum soup, but with the addition of scrumptious soft-shelled crab and bouncy calamari.

After a plentiful round of appetisers, the delicious buttery

scent of warm naan bread filled the air, and with it came a plate of red-hot tandoori chicken – one of Umami's signature dishes that features a roasted chicken prepared with yoghurt and spices in a clay oven. The chicken tasted especially succulent wrapped in the blanket of warm bread and dipped into a pool of coriander yoghurt sauce.

A few seconds later, there was an intense sound that drew my attention and a heaping helping of the Mixed Sizzling platter, which featured Chinese-style stir fry of mixed vegetables, chicken, beef and prawns was brought out. The crackling dish was accompanied by a plate of vegetable fried rice and Chilli Beef, which included strips of lean beef sautéed with julienne carrots, spring onions and green chillies.

With the assortment of Szechuan

and South Asian dishes we devoured, it was nice to wrap up the meal with a cosy and warm dessert. We topped off the meal with apple blast a la mode, with juicy sweet apples fried to perfection with some cinnamon and sweet vanilla ice cream drizzled in chocolate syrup.

The portions were flavourful and filling and each dish we sampled was at a fantastic price point – around BD5 or less. While there are some dishes on the menu that cost a bit more, it is safe to say that your mind, body and wallet will leave with a great sense of fulfilment.

Stay tuned as Umami has some specials in the works and also plans to have the lounge open within the year. Hours of operation are 1pm-midnight on weekdays and 1pm-1am on weekends. For more information, call 17365212.

