

eating out

» gastro d'nom

African cuisine at its best

I'm so excited about this new find that I'll sum it up for you even before I describe the place. Blanco's is African cuisine in the 21st Century, as I will elaborate below.

I wish there were more such restaurants around just as I wish there were more commercial buildings like Timau Plaza. With a lot of steel plating, glass panelling and wide staircases, this building is more welcoming than many of the concrete monstrosities mushrooming in Nairobi. The restaurant has its own steel staircase that leads to its balcony. The floor here is solid glass through which the pond below will be visible once it is filled. Right now, it is too hot and sunny to sit outside during the day, but it is equally lovely inside. In fact the setting outside is deceptive and for all passersby, it looks like a casual café.

The inside is a well-designed restaurant: simple with subtly elegant ambience. With earthy tones of rust brown; the reddish brown hue of the wooden furniture, the drapes, the uniforms, the table mats, napkins and napkin holders all speak volumes of understated class. The metal sculptures, by a famous Kenyan artiste indicate that a lot of investment has gone into the place.

A small menu with limited items offers fantastic food with African theme cooked with a unique twist, often fused with other influences. It is creative cuisine at its best. The reason for their success in the culinary section is that they have left things simple, not overdoing it with too many flavours and letting the natural tastes of the ingredients speak for themselves.

Most of the menu items are headed off in high-level Kiswahili, but with explanations in English. If anything seems difficult to understand, the knowledgeable waitresses will explain in detail. The service is very interactive and will communicate your order very effectively to the kitchen.

There is a lot of emphasis on fish, cooked the coastal way. For starters, there is a seafood broth with coconut, dried prawns and flakes of shark! For mains, they offer a choice of sea or fresh water fish, whole or fillet, baked or grilled with lime, chilli and coriander. Your option is then served with a choice of sauces: Blanco's special, coconut sauce or lemon butter. I chose grilled red snapper with coconut sauce and received a big platter of the freshest fish and a delicious coconut sauce. If this is how fish will always be served here then it may just dissolve my

BLANCO'S

Timau Plaza
Off Argwings Kodhek Road
Hurlingham
Tel: 3864670/1

Food: Very Good

Ambience: Very Good

Service: Very Good

Price: Sh2500 for two courses and shared bottles of wine. Credit Cards accepted.

dislike for cooked fish. As if that is not enough, they also have deep-fried fish in the starters section and do fish specials like grilled salmon on cassava — fabulous — and baked Parrot Fish with an assortment of condiments.

There is chicken consommé with local beans, pumpkin soup, samosas, local beans (five varieties) salad with orange, chicken wings and a host of others. For mains they offer Pork or Lamb chops, Pepper Steak, chicken and vegetable casserole. For vegetarians, there is ravioli with local greens and cheese, assorted root vegetables in coconut, and mixed vegetables. All mains are served with a choice of 'mukimu' (mashed potato with peas), ugali, cassava, arrowroot and potato chips, coconut or plain rice. The portions are massive, the meat very well prepared and of good quality. All the dishes we tried were very good, leaving us with not a single reason for complaint except that they may want to tone down the salt in the accompanying spinach. Desserts are Western dishes with African ingredients, like mango and passion fruit cheesecake (although couldn't get any mango taste), spicy cake, fruit salad or coconut crème brulee.

Their wine selection is more extensive than their menu, but pricey. They have a red wine from a Private Bin, a rare occurrence and one that connoisseurs would enjoy, although priced at Sh7,300 a bottle. On the second visit, I also realised that Blanco's has a small lounge bar at the back.

It is comforting to know that people still put in a lot of time and effort into creating different types of restaurants. Blanco's has restored my faith in eating out.

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