



Push the Boat Out at Nunos!

REFINED DINING AT THE ROCK'S PEERLESS ITALIAN RESTAURANT

WORDS **BELINDA BECKETT** PHOTOGRAPHY **JON SEGUI** AND COURTESY OF **THE CALETA HOTEL**

It didn't seem fair on the grouper but we weren't feeling that guilty. This morning it had been happily swimming in the Gibraltar Strait, directly below our table. Now here it was on a plate, pan fried in butter and garnished with parsley.

there's John Dory, beef tenderloin served on a sizzler and scallops wrapped in pancetta with sweet potato and a Pedro Ximenz reduction – the latter a done deal for my dinner

companion, who went on to discover just how fresh and tasty that grouper was. My choice was also no contest: it wasn't soup weather but Nunos' minestrone is light and summery – tiny al dente vegetables in a tasty broth topped with fresh Parmesan; and a mouth-meltingly tender mint-crust rack of lamb, served with crisp mange tout, baby asparagus and a mountain of utterly buttery mash.

Dishes arrived under silver cloches which were lifted with a flourish, denoting the confidence the two head chefs have in their cuisine. And rightly so as every morsel lived up to its fanfare. Wali the super-attentive Maître d' guided us through the exotic list of Italian and Spanish wines, selecting a silky Azpilicuenta Rioja reserva for the lamb course, an almond-flavoured Gavi di Gavi Fratelli Levis from Piedmont for the fish and a tangy orange wine from Huleva to go with a mini degustación of the dessert menu – lemon tart, chocolate brownie, a cloud-light yogurt foam topped with fresh strawberries and refreshing melon soup.

We were surprised to discover that neither of the chefs are Italian – although clearly that's irrelevant. Jan Wondres is from the Czech Republic but trained in Naples; Spaniard Daniel Marquez used to work over the border at La Linea's renowned La Marina restaurant. They import most of their meat and veg from Morocco, not Spain, where the quality and choice is superior, Jan told us.

For top nosh and top notch service in a dramatic seascape setting, you should expect to pay a little more. In fact, to drain every last drop of pleasure out of this delicious refined dining experience (and your wine glass) I recommend the further investment of an overnight stay at the Caleta. For a night at Nunos it's worth pushing the boat out and you will not be disappointed.



THE CATCH OF THE DAY AT NUNO'S IS THAT FRESH!

Every morning a local fisherman brings the Caleta Hotel's stylish Italian restaurant a selection of his daily haul – sea bass, sea bream, lobster, blue fin tuna, too, in season. Tonight the grouper lucked-out. At 11 kilos it was quite a catch (fished, of course, in Gibraltar's territorial waters).

We sat outside beneath a vast white shade sail, seagulls wheeling above us, waves crashing onto the rocks below. The tiered terrace juts out over Catalan Bay like the deck of a mega yacht. In front of us, a convoy of container ships waited their turn in the bunkering queue. Behind them, we could make out the misty contour of Africa. Gibraltar's much-anticipated five-star Sunborn ship hotel may be grabbing all the headlines of late but anyone who knows Nunos must wonder what all the fuss is about. The setting is as nautical as you can get without actually being afloat and Nunos has been charting a successful course in the fine dining firmament for more than 15 years; making waves, at that, with a Michelin recommendation and two AA Rosettes.

Sheltered below the sheer limestone cliff on the dramatic eastern side of The Rock, it's fresh and cool here even in sticky July. Perhaps the Barbary macaques know that. There's often

a welcoming committee perched on the wall opposite Little Genoa, the neighbouring crescent of multi-coloured houses named after the area's early settlers; although the scenery is more evocative of the Naples coastline (you could be in Sorrento or Amalfi), a geographical similarity noted in Nunos' interior décor, where cloths and cushions are picked out in Neapolitan ice cream colours. The ornaments and glass candle lamps are a nod to north Africa and the Caleta's sister hotel in Morocco. Curtained alcoves for private dining confirm what we've heard – that Nunos is a popular business lunch venue for Gibraltar's government ministers.

But on a night like this, with moonlight shimmering on the water, it has to be al fresco – preferably with a glass of chilled fino. (Be careful with long-stemmed glasses which easily keel over on the weather-beaten surface of the ceramic-tiled tables. There are no cloths outside, my only criticism.)

An artfully-presented appetiser of sea bream roe with chive oil and a shot glass of chilled salmorejo gave us a taste of what was to come, and there's focaccio to nibble on too. Alongside classics like buffalo mozzarella, carpaccio, osso buco and the most complete list of home-made pastas and sauces this side of the Tower of Pisa,