



Restaurant Review

Mediterranean Fusion Cuisine

BY CHARLES MARCANETTI

IDIDN'T MEAN IT TO HAPPEN. I just went out to eat and, on a hunch (maybe fate, maybe coincidence), we drove past a very new eatery, at least one I hadn't ever seen before. So, being ever inquisitive, I quietly peeked in. It was empty. Oh, there was what looked like an entire hosting and wait staff...but not one customer.

That is usually my cue to beat a hasty retreat. But this place was gorgeous. It wasn't loud, yet it wasn't subtle. It wasn't big, yet it was anything but small. I suppose it was easy to have perfectly ironed tablecloths and crisp linen napkins — after all, there were no customers to make any mess.

Still, it seemed too, too classy and classic to be invisible. So, I secretly studied the personnel. They were as meticulously coiffed and dressed as the dining area was adorned. There wasn't any way I could sneak in, as there was nowhere to hide. So, I invited my equally daring guests to take the plunge.

In the end, what we would all discover is a new masterpiece. Breathe! Not you, dear readers, but Breathe, the restaurant. It is absolutely going to become a destination and a landmark. I am proud, albeit by accident, to be the first to review Delray Beach's newest gift to South Florida.

Breathe is located at 401 West Atlantic Avenue in Delray Beach (561-330-4526). It may appear that there is little parking available, but again, that is one of the surprises. There are two dedicated parking lots and, by the time this article is published, there will be great valet parking, as well. But the hubbub of parking and traffic are, like much of this delightful fusion restaurant, quietly tucked away from the city bustle.

We'll get to the food—the extraordinary Mediterranean fusion gourmet creations — in just a moment.



I want to mention the bar/lounge. There are mostly-private, low, seating (almost bench-like) areas around the perimeter, allowing for quieter conversation (some with privacy curtains), as well as a state-of-the-art DJ booth and a fantastically stocked bar with a complete range of great wines and top-shelf spirits. The bartender mixes the best French martinis we've had in a very long time and, as you may know, if you can mix a good French martini, you can mix anything.

For the ambiance, sophistication and quality of staff and service, the liquor prices are quite reasonable. Let's be honest, though, since we were the only people there, perhaps the bartender spent more time mixing and



blending so as to make a good impression. I asked my Mrs., Maria, and my bosses, Jack and Sharon, to watch closely and they told me that not only was he not doing anything less quickly, but his speed and accuracy were clearly the signs of a highly trained professional proud of his work product.

My food review is coming up, and I assure you, I could write 10,000 words of praise for these delicacies. But I had one more shock that evening that I must share. It turns out that my long-time friend, Sylvie Benloulou, is the General Manager. Our meeting was more of a homecoming and a celebration followed by her apologies for not telling us about her new venture. Those of you who follow the area restaurant openings know well what Sylvie has accomplished for many others.

Now, shall we say, it is for herself, as well as the brave local businessman/restaurateur, whose name I am sworn to withhold (for a short while) who recognized her talent and joined forces to create Breathe. Sylvie explained that the restaurant was open for merely one week. It was planned as a very soft opening (no advertising or marketing), so that every detail could be honed and polished. Then, when the word got out, everything would really be ready. Let the word go forth that Breathe (I can't resist it) is a breath of fresh air for Delray Beach and the many-mile surrounding area.

If this place had this menu but was housed in some hovel, it would still be a success...yes, that is how great the recipes are.

The two chefs, Executive Chef Marcel Ivan and Sous Chef Aysar Fuqaha, have taken their immense talents and created blends of virtually every Mediterranean country's specialty to harmonize with each other and with the diners' palates. The soup we all shared was a lentil-based, vegetarian delight that ought not to be called lentil or vegetarian because some folks may hesitate to try it as a result. They would lose out on the finest introduction to the next courses ever presented.

We shared a couple of incredible salads: Breathe Caesar salad, made with grilled baby romaine, anchovies and ciabatta croutons; and the aubergine salad consisting of roasted eggplant, herb goat cheese, toasted sunflower seeds and fresh plum tomatoes. It's usually very difficult to find exciting words for salad. Not at Breathe, because these salads are not what we would throw together at home. They are combinations of well-chosen ingredients prepared (not merely placed in a bowl) and offered as part of a truly luxurious evening.

The main courses were perfectly suited for this eatery which boasts of "fusing" not only various national dishes side by side with their neighbors' creations, but also adding the "fusion" of presentation, balance and portion. We started with marinated lamb chops, which, though grilled, were grilled in an almost magical way. Most restaurants grill the meats so that there is a gentle searing around the outside, giving a mere taste of grilling.

At Breathe, the grill creates a generous envelope of searing, embracing the sweetest, tenderest meat, marinated and served with rosemary, roasted potatoes and olive vinaigrette. Equally tender, sweet and mouth-watering was the snapper beurre blanc made with lemon, butter and capers and served with garlic smashed potatoes. Ever the lover of pasta, I added the porcini ravioli and I am truly thrilled that I did. It was as expertly prepared as any I've ever had and the butter sage sauce brought every nuance to life.

Our most memorable evening ended with apple galette, more commonly known as apple tart, but here so uncommon as to deserve an equally unique name, crème brulee and dulce de leche xangos, which are fried spring rolls stuffed with sweet cream cheese and caramel. Amazing and perfect as everything was, I am convinced that this eatery will gain a place on this year's best reviewed list. I absolutely encourage all of you to Breathe...often. ✨