

NEW REVIEWS

Time Out visits restaurants anonymously and pays for meals



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Fakhreldine

Mayfair Lebanese gets a makeover.

Following several months of closure, Piccadilly's Fakhreldine has reopened boasting the kind of makeover usually reserved for popettes like Britney, Christina and Kylie. While not quite thrusting its crotch in a satin thong or flashing a no-knickers behind, this restyling moves Middle Eastern dining out of the axis of evil into a place that's just a little bit naughty. From trad, wholesome and bland, Fakhreldine has emerged as cool, sophisticated and very seductive. It's gained a smart new logo and graphic identity, a large dreamily-lit corral of a bar, a louche lounging section of chocolate suede banquettes, and a beautiful new formal dining area of stained oak and stone greys. (What hasn't changed is the panoramic view of Green Park.)

The food is the most exciting new element of all. The menu is relatively brief with a single page of starters and mains, supplemented by a double spread of

meze. Basics are handled beautifully – a mixed meze selection of hummous, tabbouleh, spinach sambousek, muhammara, falafel and warak einalh (£18 for two) included some of the freshest, tastiest and outright finest examples of each that we've ever sampled. Even better, are the intriguing mains. Lamb with sour cherries? We had this once in Aleppo, Syria, where it was so decadently rich and heavy, we were sick afterwards in a manner not unlike Jack Nicholson in *The Witches of Eastwick*. Not so here, where the lamb is reduced to a minced patty on a bed of shredded leek with the fruit used sparingly. It's a strange and sultry mix. A dish of 'five-spice lamb' came with pilaf-like rice (studded with pistachios, pine kernels and carrot slivers), with chunks of tender meat on the bone baked in cinnamon, nutmeg and three other less readily identifiable spices. Sublime. Desserts also impressed: Lebanese fritters were little golden pods that popped in the mouth,

releasing bursts of orange blossom, while awamat bi laban (literally 'inflatable rings with milk') was a milky pudding with accompanying dinky little jugs of strawberry and orangesyrup.

The one bum note was struck by the cocktails. It's pointless spending all that money on a big flash bar and shelves of glinting bottles if staff don't know what to do with it all. Our two drinks were over-iced to the extent that they resembled semi-alcoholic Slush Puppies. It's a common failing with new London restaurants – they'll happily pay big bucks for a name chef, a big noise interior design company, and put the PR on overdrive, yet put the waiter on the back. Then again, who goes to a Lebanese restaurant for the booze? *Andrew Humphreys*

Fakhreldine 85 Piccadilly, W1J 7NB (020 7493 3424) Green Park tube. Open Mon-Sat 12noon-12midnight, Sun 11am-11pm. Meal for two with wine and service: around £100. Set lunch £15.

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Brilliant Breakfasts

It's 'National Breakfast Week' (who decrees these things?), so here are five alternatives to a bowl of cereal at home. *GD*

Balham Bar & Kitchen

From 8am every day, this new brasserie serves porridge, blueberry muffins, full cooked breakfast, ham and cheese croissants, bacon and egg butties and even egg and soldiers. *Balham Bar & Kitchen, 15-19 Bedford Hill, SW12 (020 8875 6900) Balham tube/rail.*

The Cinnamon Club

Parliament may be in recess, but this Indian restaurant's breakfasts aren't (Mon-Fri, 7.30-9.30am). The choices include: Indian (rawa dosai, spiced potato paratha); Anglo-Indian (kedgeree); continental; or English. £16 for the Full English; tea and coffee cost extra.

The Cinnamon Club, The Old Westminster Library, Great Smith Street, SW1 (020 7222 2555) St James's Park tube.

Eat And Two Veg

This new, centrally located vegetarian diner does a veggie version of the Full English for £6, a fully vegan breakfast for a fiver, and also has the likes of croissants and even poached egg on toast. Breakfast served Mon-Fri 8-11am, Sat 9am-2pm, Sun 10am-2pm. *Eat And Two Veg, 50 Marylebone High St, W1 (020 7258 8595) Baker St or Regent's Park tube.*

Grand Café and Bar

Monday to Friday only (8am-12noon) for those City folk, this is Conran's latest offering (opened in June). It's in the Royal Exchange, a counter in the central atrium of this shopping centre. There's no hot food, but the pastries are good. *Grand Café and Bar, The Royal Exchange, EC3 (020 7618 2480) Bank tube/DLR.*

St John Bread and Wine

This branch of Clerkenwell's St John opened in May. It's open for breakfast every day from 8-11am, serving up a selection of dishes which include kippers, kedgeree, bacon sarnies, granola and yogurt, poached fruit, or soft rolls on toast. *St John Bread and Wine, 94-96 Commercial St, E1 (020 7247 8724) Liverpool St tube/rail.*