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# FLAVOURS OF A SICILIAN SUMMER

MODERN INTERPRETATIONS WITH THE IMPRINT OF SICILIAN CULTURE NOW BEING SERVED AT **ROSSO**. LEANNE MILLS INVESTIGATES

**The colour** red is used liberally at Rosso, the stylish and contemporary Italian restaurant on the ground floor of the Four Seasons hotel. Red banquette seating, well-spaced tables, red leather chairs and acres of red and purple carpet are features of Rosso's modern and tasteful interior. It has a chic-saloon feel, yet provides a casual dining atmosphere oozing with sophistication.

01 ROSSO'S ENTICING ANTIPASTI BUFFET

Chef di Cucina Marco Terranova, born in Sicily and trained in Syracuse on the island's east coast, creates delicious Italian dishes at Rosso which are evocative of his homeland. He insists on importing all produce from Europe as he's accustomed to cooking with only the freshest ingredients. It's this attention to quality and Terranova's Sicilian background that is the nexus of Rosso's cuisine: modern





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**02** RELAX INTO THE ROSSO'S STYLISH RED BANQUETTES  
**03** ROSSO'S CHEF DI CUCINA, MARCO TERRANOVA, GREW UP IN SICILY, LIVING AND BREATHING GREAT ITALIAN CUISINES

dishes with a traditional heart; sumptuous yet humble.

The extensive antipasti buffet stood proudly in the centre of the restaurant as we entered; beyond this it was possible to see into the open kitchen with its distinctive wood-burning pizza oven. We were greeted warmly and seated quickly by the attentive Rosso staff. As we settled with the menus, we were presented with two fruity mocktails and a basket brimful of freshly baked fluffy breads and assorted grissini.

At first glance, the menu provides the discerning diner with the standard fare of hot and cold starters, pasta, pizza, fish and meats, yet, on closer inspection, the descriptions of each dish really tantalized the tastebuds. We decided to steer clear of the gut-busting potential of the antipasti buffet and instead we ordered two cold starters from the à la carte menu. Before our plates arrived, an appetizing

amuse bouche was served – a giant king prawn dusted in a coconut crumb and sat perched on a flavoursome tomato coulis. It was finger-licking delicious.

The light starter of Tartara D' Aragosta Con Cremino di Patate – lobster tartar with potato cream – came neatly stacked with morsels of toasted bread. The plate was drizzled with pesto oil which provided a serious taste sensation. The Liatina D'agnello salad of lean lamb strips with baby spinach and Ragusano cheese was served with cubes of "lemon chilly jelly", the latter adding an interesting texture to the to the dish without carrying much flavor.

The service from the kitchen was efficient, yet we still had time to digest and critique each course. Rosso's waiting staff have been well trained; they kept a watchful eye on every table and we only needed to look briefly for assistance before a waiter was attending to our needs. We asked for recommendations and were told that Chef Marco's speciality was his freshly made pasta. Many Italians believe that pasta

was invented in Sicily and began its domination of the Italian peninsula after it was exported to Genoa on the mainland.

The smiling and friendly Chef Marco escaped his busy kitchen and came to our table. He explained some of his cooking techniques and, before departing, promised to impress us with his lasagne. Bold words, we thought, but when the piping hot dish was served as the il primo course, the cheese and nutmeg-sprinkled topping made this family favourite a real delight.

The pezzo forto was the agnolotti pasta served as a main dish. Agnolotti is similar to ravioli and traditionally would be stuffed with leftover meats. But Rosso's adaptation offered pumpkin-filled pasta parcels in a rich shellfish cream sauce, liberally scattered with fat juicy king prawns. The sauce was the highlight; lusciously full of flavour and reminiscent of lobster bisque. Marco confirmed our hunch when he explained how lobster and prawn shells were boiled down and sieved before heavy cream was added.

The other main course was a lighter choice of roasted Chilean sea bass with simple flavours and cooked to flaky perfection. Every forkful was a melt-in-the-mouth experience; the delicate lemon sauce made for a good pairing of ingredients; and it was all rounded off beautifully with fresh spinach and a side dish of rosemary potatoes.

"Passion and love are the main ingredients in cooking, as well as using fresh aliments with the right balance of spices and herbs," said Chef Marco.

"And just remember that the simpler

the dish is, the better it tastes".

Chef Marco has experience of crafting signature dishes for hotel restaurants in Europe and the Middle East, having spent years with the Sheraton in Edinburgh and in Doha. His family name, Terranova, means 'new land' and, as a chef with Princess Cruises, he has travelled extensively searching for inspiration for his cooking.

"Riyadh has an inspiring multicultural society which helps me to be more creative in my dishes, and the people are very friendly and open minded to the taste of Italian cuisine," he said.

Sicilian cuisine has a devotion to dolci or 'sweet' and Terranova's traditional heart shone through with the desserts he presented at the end of this enjoyable meal. The Cassata Siciliana was a striking visual delight; a domed shape decorated with a colourful candied cherry, precariously balanced on a verdant green marzipan coating. This traditional dessert was served alongside a modern interpretation of tiramisù; a crispy crust gave way to a velvety mouthful, perfectly balanced by sharp red currants.

No Italian meal is complete without an espresso and, as we sat back and soaked up the ambience of this elegant eatery, we agreed our meal had certainly matched our expectations of a Four Seasons' establishment.

All in all, a worthy winner of the 2013 Saudi Excellence in Tourism Award for hotel casual dining experience. ■

■ Rosso at the Four Seasons, Riyadh  
Opening hours: 19:00 – 01:00, seven days a week  
Tel: +966 (1) 211-5000

04 LOBSTER TARTAR  
05 PUMPKIN AGNOLOTTI  
06 ROASTED CHILEAN SEA BASS

