

# Starters as you should mean to go on

## RESTAURANT REVIEW

### Meze House, Aberdeen

**VISIT Meze House on a school-day lunchtime and there's a fair chance you'll bump into pupils from the local school eating burgers, kebabs and knocking back fizzy drinks, writes Jill Dunning.**

But at night, the Turkish takeaway/restaurant transforms into something a little more sedate. The tables are laid with glasses and tablecloths, and an *a la carte* menu becomes the focus. It's a bit like Stars in Their Eyes: the humble takeaway seems to have said: "The next time I come through those doors Matthew/Cat, I'm going to be a proper restaurant."

Of course, the venue is still operating its typical kebab house set-up with its vast open grill, tubs of salad and donor kebab spinning around, but the stream of takeaway customers that came in steadily from around 8.15pm on the Friday night we dined there was not intrusive.

Meze House has the added bonus of a bring-your-own drinks policy, so if you're going down the wine route, you can take your pick from the off-license or whatever you have in your wine rack.

The decor is simple and avoids the obvious Mediterranean colours of blues and terracottas. Instead, it's a calming mix of creams and magnolia that pays homage to Turkey's classical heritage with slabs of mock-archaeological frescoes on the wall.

Initially, we settled at one table, but I decided I was in a draught, and we moved. There's not heaps of room in here and it's not the place for a private conversation, but it is pleasantly relaxed and informal. The background music started off with the subtle tones of traditional Turkish

tunes, but then veered across a spectrum from a particularly noisy can-can which made me think Buster Bloodvessel was about to burst through the door, through Donna Summer's, I Need Love, to more laid-back Dean Martin songs.

Having made the mistake at other Greek and Turkish restaurants of filling up on a mixed meze to start and then not being able to do justice to the main course, the Critical Yorkshireman and I decided to pick three starters to share.

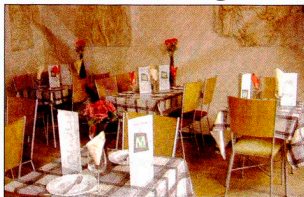
I'd been here before for a takeaway chicken kebab lunch (a healthy option opposed to a mayo-filled sarnie, I thought) when I discovered that the personable owner Mohamad Elbehaderie was clearly passionate about his food. As I waited for my kebab, he kept giving me tasters of humus and tebuli that one of his employees was making for the evening trade.

By the time he insisted I sampled a soup, I was beginning to wonder if I would have room left for my lunch.

Anyway, his samples had worked, because here I was, back for a sit-down meal and keen to refresh my taste buds with a proper portion of the humus (crushed chickpeas blended with tahini, olive oil and garlic) and tebuli (which you may know as tabbouleh – a salad of cous-cous, tomato, parsley and onion).

The CY agreed with my choices and added the tavuk kizartma (deep-fried spicy chicken wings served with a creamy garlic and yoghurt sauce).

I'm pleased to report that the starters chosen by me were a great success. The tebuli tasted freshly made and had a lovely lemony tang, although the cous-cous grains were larger than normal, making me think it could have been made from buckwheat rather than semolina.



There was also a nice bite to the humus, which had a firm texture.

The chicken wings were less of a success. The CY said the dressing tasted more like the 1000-Island variety, rather than the garlicky, yoghurty mix he had been expecting, but the actual chicken was OK.

My main course of mixed kebab wasn't what I'd been expecting either. The menu had said the karisik izgara would comprise kofte (spicy, minced lamb cooked on skewers), lamb (which I assumed would be shish – cubes of meat) and chicken.

Somehow the lamb had been replaced with donor (cooked on the upright, rotating spit). And there was heaps of it.

Now, I usually avoid donor kebabs due to their associations with my younger days, when it seemed like a good idea to have what a friend termed 'meat in a plimsoll', after a night out. It's not that they taste bad, it's just that it takes ages to get rid of the taste the next day. So, I would have just preferred the simple meat chunks.

As I started to attack my Desperate Dan-sized portion of donor slices, which had skillfully been cut wafer thin, I noted that some of the chicken and kofte was a bit

too char-grilled for my liking – the emphasis on the char rather than the grill.

Nevertheless, it was tasty and came with such an equally generous helping of rice, red cabbage, cucumber and tomato that I wondered if I'd been given a meal for four.

For his main course, the CY chose karni yarik (aubergine stuffed with seasoned mince, drizzled with mozzarella and oven-baked). Again, it comprised a huge mound of food. The CY reported that it tasted like a spicy moussaka and, as it had more heat than he had been expecting, he couldn't taste the lamb mince.

Despite our best intentions not to stuff ourselves with a meze of mixed starters, there was no way we could finish our main meals, and desserts were out of the question.

We both felt a bit let down by our main dishes and reckoned that for a future visit we should just order an array of starters for the entire meal.

But I do like the Meze House for its down-to-earth simplicity and relaxed atmosphere – and it's reasonably priced menu. We paid £29.50 and took a bottle of wine from home.

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