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Sofitel The Obelisk

DUBAI

Located in Dubai's WAFI development, Sofitel's Egyptian-themed hotel – it's largest in the Middle East – features five experience-led dining concepts.

Words: Devina Divecha
Photography: Courtesy of Accor (unless otherwise stated)

Sofitel Dubai The Obelisk opened its doors on 29 October 2020 – making it one of the few hotels to launch in the United Arab Emirates in the last 12 months. The design of the overall property seamlessly merges modern French art de vivre and ancient Egyptian heritage with the essence and culture of the UAE – complementing the interiors of the adjoining WAFI complex and the Raffles Dubai pyramid.

The brief was to find a link between the French influence of Sofitel and an Egyptian theme – leading designers to the Art Deco period in Paris. “We wanted to tie in the really strong ancient Egyptian Pharaonic era, which the Art Deco period borrowed a lot of influence from,” explains Claire Craig, WA International Design Director. “I like working on heavily themed projects and the hotel just had a great concept to begin with. I had worked on Carters British pub in the WAFI complex 25 years ago so it was nice to be back.”

The property has five signature dining outlets, all managed in-house – Brasserie Boulud, Taiko Dubai, The Nine Gastropub, Bijou Patisserie and Soleil Pool & Lounge – with the F&B team led by Executive Chef Patrick Boucher and Director of Food & Beverage Harry Massolin.

Making his debut in the Middle East is Daniel Boulud with Brasserie Boulud, which brings the true meaning of ‘gastronomic Française’ to Dubai with simple, fresh and seasonal dishes. Its Chef de Cuisine, Nicolas Lemoyne,





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The five dining venues feature glassware by Chef & Sommelier and Arcoroc and buffetware by Siom Orfevres and Revol

who has previously worked at Boulud's two-star Michelin restaurant Daniel in New York, will seek to build on this experience, serving up contemporary French cuisine that is rooted in tradition, whilst embracing a more casual approach to fine dining. Guests can indulge in dishes such as traditional escargots with garlic and parsley butter served with free-range chicken oyster, citrus cured Hamachi (yellow tail amberjack) with Niçoise seasoning; Cocotte baked seabream with saffron, fennel and tomato; and dessert classics such as floating island, vacherin, rhubarb and raspberry charlotte. The open kitchen offers a multi-sensory dining experience overlooking the traditional brasserie seating, while the adjoining main dining room has been designed in a conservatory aesthetic. "We treat a lot of hotels like our homes and in the main dining room, we thought it would be nice to have a conservatory. We put in a skylight and added a lot of plants and greenery," explains Craig.

Amsterdam-born concept Taiko, conceptualised by chef Schilo van Coevorden – who worked in Dubai at the same complex more than 20 years ago – represents another collaboration for the hotel. Taiko Dubai – which was designed by Atelier EPJ – is the brand's first international outpost and specialities include Wagyu biryani and the brand's watermelon sashimi.

Alongside the menu is Taiko's signature cocktails, which take inspiration from a speakeasy in downtown Roppongi, Tokyo. The cocktail menu is accompanied by a range of sushi, sashimi, dim sum and the popular TFC (Taiko Fried Chicken). "It has four kitchens, from a cold sushi counter to a hot robata with an engaging and lively nightlife-style concept. It's all about coming

to experience not only amazing Asian food but also food with a few Middle Eastern touches," comments Harry Massolin, Director of Food & Beverage.

In addition to these collaborations, Sofitel Dubai The Obelisk has created a number of concepts in-house including The Nine, a British neighbourhood gastropub with an ancient Egyptian influence. The menu provides traditional recipes with a contemporary twist such as the signature fish and chips, The Nine burger and posh bangers and mash. According to Massolin, while gastropubs typically tend to focus on the food complementing the drinks, The Nine is offering a culinary experience that is matched by the beverage menu. "We are very confident that we have the best fish and chips in town. Michael O'Shea (the restaurant's chef de cuisine) makes it in a way that has not been done here and is very traditional to the southern part of England."

Accompanying the food menu is the wine list, offering organic and biodynamic options as well as a gin trolley. Meanwhile, the design of The Nine references the story of the Egyptian cat goddess, Bastet. "We introduced Bastet on large backlit painted panels in the pub area. We hung the three pyramids of Giza from the ceiling and introduced the story on the wall. Everything in there is a little triangular," reflects Craig.

Meaning jewel in French, Bijou, a patisserie offers an array of pastries and other sweet treats. Sofitel's signature French afternoon tea, Le Gouter, is served here – the highlight is tea served in a sophisticated jewellery box, unlocked with a special key. This experience has proved to be a huge success within



the local community, according the F&B team. “Bijou is focused on a French concept, both from a patisserie to an experience standpoint. When we first thought about the idea, it was to create a hub not only for guests passing through or visiting the hotel but also for the local, Emirati community,” explains Massolin.

Finally, Soleil Pool & Lounge serves a Mediterranean- and Levantine-inspired menu, carefully crafted cocktails and varied shisha flavours. The concept offers an extra touch of luxury with its private cabanas. The VIP cabanas are fitted with privacy curtains and showers, as well as a Jacuzzi. Guests can also enjoy complimentary fresh fruit and sweet popsicles, as well as amenities such as Oshibori face towels and luxury L’Occitane en Provence beauty products – all served by a dedicated waiter.

“We stay true to all our concepts – in Bijou, we have a French pastry chef doing French viennoiserie, a British chef sticking true to the gastropub feel in The Nine, and you can take that up to the Brasserie as well,” reflects

Patrick Boucher, the hotel’s Executive Chef. “We follow traditional cooking techniques – without shortcuts. We worked on at least six to seven different pastries for the steak and kidney pie, for example. Our baker who makes our croissants is from Lyon and is a real artist. We have been very fortunate to have people who are passionate about their tasks and profession.”

As Massolin notes, in a region with several spectacular hotels, the new property has what it takes to stand out. “As a Sofitel, we have positioned ourselves to be not what people expect. We are the biggest Sofitel in the Middle East, and the second largest globally – and that is already a good start,” he explains. “In Dubai, you can have the most beautiful property, the most beautiful uniforms and so on, but if you don’t have substance, then you just become another hotel. We try to offer an experience that no else does. And that is difficult. Because there are a lot of hotels, and there are many great ideas. But it’s about the experience and the consistency.”



IN A BITE

Operator: Accor
 Architecture: Arkitektnik International
 Interior Design: WA International, Atelier EPJ (Taiko)
 Executive Chef: Patrick Boucher
 Chef de Cuisine: Michael O’Shea
 F&B Director: Harry Massolin
 Glassware: Arcoroc, Libbey,
 Chef & Sommelier,
 Buffetware: Siom Orfèvres
 Front-of-House Catering Equipment:
 LaCimbali
www.all.accor.com