

RESTAURANT

Review

# New and Recommended

Rather than follow the area review format we have used so far in *Barbican Life*, this time we thought it might be a good idea to vary the pattern, so we are reporting on 'new' restaurants (new either encompassing completely new openings, those which might otherwise fall outside our normal coverage parameters, and those which have opened since we covered their area in previous issues.) We are also adding in a report on an existing restaurant which has joined our BA discount scheme with an interesting offer.

Another novelty is that we are publishing Barbican Residents' recommendations on restaurants – mostly from [barbicantalk.com](http://barbicantalk.com).

The first of the new restaurants is (like most others which spring up) a reworking of an older establishment. This is the new Brasserie St Julien in Long Lane, which has taken over from one of the two Mustards restaurants located there. Like its predecessor it serves French cuisine, but now under the guidance of its new part-owner Francois Jobard, who hails from Avignon in Provence, and brings some authentic French cuisine to the establishment. The atmosphere and décor are convivial

and pleasant and there is an excellent bar area.

Food pricing is at the higher end of the local scale – perhaps in line with such established French style restaurants as the Café du Marché in Charterhouse Street. Dishes are pleasant, although not exceptional – but that may change as the new team becomes established. The Brasserie St Julien is open Mondays to Fridays for lunch and dinner, and recently has started to open Saturday evenings as well, apparently due to local demand.

A typical meal will probably set you back around £40 per head

including wine, although there is also a pretty limited set menu at a very reasonable £10.95 per head.

Last issue we covered restaurants in St John Street, only to find that two new establishments, right next door to each other, were opened just after *Barbican Life* went to press. Both of these have already attracted some very positive comments from Barbican residents, so it would have been a great shame to leave them out of our magazine by dint of having already covered the area in which they are located.

The first of these is called Pho and serves Vietnamese food at 86

St John Street (on the right hand side heading from Smithfield towards Clerkenwell Road. A brief visit there midweek recently showed that it already has managed to attract a strong clientele, being virtually full up at 6.45 pm – although this was, apparently the day after a good review in the *Metro* free London newspaper. Pho has also joined the BA Member discount scheme and offers 15% off to BA members. Pho is one of the restaurants which has featured a great deal recently in restaurant comment on [barbicantalk](http://barbicantalk.com) – all of it very positive - see later on in this article.

The restaurant itself is of the cheap and cheerful variety. It is a small and extremely convivial place to eat and comments on the quality of the food served have been glowing. As the name suggests, the emphasis is on 'Pho' – a kind of very nourishing, very tasty, Vietnamese noodle based soup/stew. With the most expensive dish on the menu at around £7.50, it is well within the reach of all Barbican pockets. It also serves Vietnamese beer. Pho is open from Monday to Fri 12noon-10pm and on Saturday from 6-10pm.

Right next door to Pho at No. 88 St John Street is Portal, described by another [barbicantalk](http://barbicantalk.com) contributor as 'modern Portuguese.' This again has already attracted a good clientele and has been helped in this by a positive review in *Time Out* magazine. It is very different in character from Pho, being in a much more formal type of restaurant, although there is a lively, and

large, bar area as you go in, which serves *petiscos* – an equivalent of *tapas* in a convivial atmosphere.

Between the bar, and the bright and spacious dining area with its constant buzz of chatter, is the soul of the restaurant, the busy kitchen. Here classics including roasted sea bass with sun-dried tomato risotto, herb-crustied lamp rump and braised wild boar are created. The head chef, Ricardo Costa previously worked at the El Girasol restaurant in Alicante – the proud possessor of two Michelin stars! The food is described as tasty and well-presented. It is not cheap, but then Portal is perhaps more of a 'special occasion' venue than one for everyday eating. A meal for two with wine and service will set you back around £40 plus per head although this is perhaps not excessive by today's standards.

The restaurant itself is very spacious. The tables are well spread out and there is a huge glass-ceilinged 'conservatory' area at the back, which itself opens out on a small courtyard area for dining alfresco when the London weather permits.

Portal reflects the passion of veteran restaurateur and owner, Antonio Correia. Fresh and simple flavours, a convivial atmosphere and unobtrusive service are what the owner has tried, and has succeeded, to bring to this new Clerkenwell venue. Call 020 7253 6950 for reservations.

Issus in the short section of Charterhouse Street leading into the north side of Charterhouse Square, is another new opening which has attracted much positive comment on [barbicantalk.com](http://barbicantalk.com).

The establishment describes itself as a "Turkish Café Grill and Meze Bar" and has a restaurant section at ground level and a café in the basement.



Issus

The owner, David, previously ran a Turkish restaurant in north London and has taken over the site of the old Deli Bar (right next door to The Rendezvous). Food is extremely tasty and I would recommend eating perhaps a series of the smaller dishes to sample the experience – which won't be too costly, even washed down with a bottle of, to me, surprisingly good Turkish dry white wine followed by a very strong cup of Turkish coffee. There is an everyday lunch special served from noon to 4 pm of two starters and a main course for £8.00

Service is friendly and efficient – and David may even be prompted to read you your fortune in coffee grounds! Opening hours are from noon to 11 pm Mondays to Saturdays, although extended opening hours have been applied for.

The basement café also sells burgers, jacket potatoes and specials at very reasonable prices.

Spice Corner, on Aldersgate Street almost under The Museum of London and Seddon House is another relatively recent opening, which has found favour with a number of Barbican residents. Like most Indian style restaurants it does offer a take-away service – and will deliver for orders totalling £10 or more. The restaurant has been offering big discounts to Barbican residents, but is now changing policy through cutting its menu prices quite substantially.

The owners have taken great trouble in completely refurbishing the premises – it was formerly an Italian restaurant – and has been promoting itself heavily within the Barbican as well as being very supportive of Barbican events. If there

Portal

Below left: Brasserie St Julien  
Below right: Pho





Spice Corner was an award for trying hard, Spice Corner would do well. Reports generally are that the food is of a high standard and staff are friendly. According to the take-away menu Spice Corner is open 7 days from noon to 11 pm – however on asking I was told that it is closed on Saturdays!

This brings me to another local favourite – rather longer established than those mentioned above which is launching, with this issue of *Barbican Life* a new discount scheme and special meal promotion to Barbican Association members. This is the Coconut Lagoon, attached to The Citadines hotel in Goswell Road. The restaurant is run independently of the hotel by a small hotel and restaurant group, called Pearl Hotels and Restaurants



Coconut Lagoon run by Kumar Muthalagappan who is of Tamil origin and whose name means Pearl in Tamil. The Group's restaurants specialise in southern Indian and colonial Malaysian cuisine. This year the Group has won the prestigious 'Best Restaurant Group in the UK 2005' award from Pat Chapman's Good Curry Guide.

At the Coconut Lagoon, the speciality is authentic southern Indian food, which is rather different from the Indian fare offered in most 'Indian' restaurants around the country. The varied cuisines are from the states of Goa, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The cuisines of these South Indian States present you with a gastronomic treat - a delicious legacy from a melting pot of diverse Indian, Portuguese, French, Dutch and British sources.

One of the special offers to BA members is the full 'Coconut Lagoon Experience' for just £20.00 per person (normally £25.00). This is inclusive of a Cocktail on arrival with nibbles, 3 course meal from the full a la carte menu, half a bottle of wine and dessert wine followed by coffee. The Coconut Lagoon is also offering a 15% discount to BA members on food – both in-restaurant and take away – but this does not apply to the 'Coconut Lagoon Experience' offer.

**Comments from Barbican residents**

Recently I instigated a 'thread' on *barbicantalk.com* a Barbican internet bulletin board, asking for comments on local restaurants. Some of those that were contributed are noted below. It should be noted that the theme was more on 'new' restaurants so it is hardly surprising that some of those mentioned above may seem to have received more than their fair share of comment over the past month or so. It is also apparent that there is some consistency in the places recommended, with Portal, Pho, Issus, The Bleeding Heart, Brasserie Malmaison, Spice Corner, the Café du Marche and the Zetter seeming to be popular among several contributors. However, because a restaurant is not mentioned here, do not assume it isn't any good. No-one has mentioned the Club Gascon or the St John, both of which generate excellent reviews from the gastronomic press..

However I realise that there are many *Barbican Life* readers who

do not participate, or wish to participate, in some, or all, forms of computer activity, but do like to eat out occasionally. Should you have comments to make on local restaurants, do please drop them through my letterbox at 5 Brandon Mews, or for those who have ventured as far as email, but don't wish to pursue the web experience further, please email any comments to me at [barbicanlife@gmail.com](mailto:barbicanlife@gmail.com). I would like this readers' comments section to become a regular part of the restaurants roundup articles. As you will see I am not specifically attributing the comments so your views would remain anonymous protecting you from irate friends and acquaintances who may not agree with your recommendations!

Some of the comments made, follow:

"Last week we tried both Portal and Pho, both excellent. I suppose one could describe Portal as modern Portuguese and they tried very hard indeed to impress, with 2 amuse-bouche tasters and a liqueur thrown in with the meal. Pleasant, 'industrial chic' surroundings and quite busy which is probably a good sign. We arrived at Pho just as it was closing, but the chef kindly obliged and produced delicious food - VERY spicy, and, I assume reasonably authentic (I haven't been to Vietnam) and the dishes were very inexpensive. Quite basic cafe-type setting, and we really enjoyed its informality. We intend to return to both restaurants. And we really like Charwol, on the corner of Aldersgate and Old streets. Fab Bangladeshi."

"Big thumbs up here for the Brasserie Malmaison. I have been there twice now, once for brunch on a Sunday and once for dinner, and on both occasions the food was delicious and very attractively presented, and service was attentive. Not cheap perhaps, but not outrageous either, and I would definitely go back again.

"Epicurean Pizza Lounge (Address: 10 Clerkenwell Green,

EC1R 0DP Phone: 020 7490 5577). A genuine revelation. Antipodean style food in a beautiful setting. Extremely pleasant service and good (although slightly quiet) ambience. Pizzas are pricey but substantial (1 is enough for 2). Many other specialities including Argentine beef. I recommend this place very highly."

"I can vouch for Spice Corner - think it's a good restaurant with brilliant food. Service is superb and staff are very welcoming. Worth going to now as prices have been slashed even more!"

"I would highly recommend Zetter (Clerkenwell Road). They serve gorgeous breakfasts. I went there again for dinner last night. The meal was as excellent as their breakfasts."

"I've been to Spice Corner too. Very friendly service, excellent food, but the location isn't ideal in a basement and I thought that even with the discount it was slightly on the pricey side compared to other restaurants in the area."

"My favourites are still the Bleeding Heart and the Cafe du Marché. Hard to go wrong with either of them for a special occasion I think, although not, perhaps, for everyday eating."

"I can vouch for both Portal and Pho. Visited Portal with my girlfriend. Food was very good. The complimentary appetisers were superb. Main courses were delicious, though I think they may not suit every palate. Portuguese cooking, which I really enjoy, can be a little robust. The puddings were quite phenomenal. I have since sent people from work down as well who enjoyed it too. Pho is a brilliant addition to Smithfield. It is a perfect place to go if you are nipping out on a Friday night when the fridge looks bare. Food is Vietnamese with big noodle soups being the mainstay of the menu. I particularly liked the plate of herbs they gave me to add

to the soup as I saw fit. The staff and the owner were incredibly friendly."

"Another good place (maybe a bit far from the Barbican?) is the Easton Pub near Exmouth Market. Earthy Australian cuisine meets European sophistication. Good value!"

"A little further to walk, but I thought I'd add that we returned to the Bleeding Heart (just up the hill from Farringdon) this week for an anniversary meal. We've enjoyed previous visits and can thoroughly recommend both bistro and restaurant -- French with a New Zealand (wine and lamb) twist. This time we ate outside at tables the restaurant has put in the end of Ely Place. Magical as the sun went down -- with candlelight and 'old-fashioned' streetlamps, remarkably quiet and windless. Not cheap -- but food, service and atmosphere get top marks. And the walk home was probably good for us!"

"Issus is a winner - so good I half don't want to mention it but I read about it on this website so fair is fair. Food very tasty with fresh ingredients and good cooking eg lamb for the minced meat balls bought at Smithfield at dawn. Also lots of choice for vegetarians. Good value at the full price and amazing value lunch deal of 2 starters and a main course for £8.00. What's more, it has a nice atmosphere. If this doesn't make it as a neighbourhood favourite then there is no pleasing us."

"We had a great meal last night at Pho: beautiful fresh and tasty ingredients, interesting menu, reasonable prices, friendly service - we'll be going regularly."

"Issus does have excellent food and is very good value. It is on the site of the old Deli Bar. We ate there tonight and were surprised by the quality."

"For a treat on a par with Malmaison, another favourite of

mine is The Zetter on St John's Square/Clerkenwell Road. Italian inspired, but it takes you a while to realise this due to its contemporary take on the food. The wine list gives it away though, with an amazing choice of largely Italian wines. The menu seems to change every month, and contrary to what you would expect from such a style Mecca, the restaurant staff are particularly friendly and helpful!"

"Strada by St Pauls on a quiet weekend night with the sun setting is quite magical by the way (and the pizzas are v good)."

"I did go to the new Vietnamese place earlier this week which was great. It's called Pho and the food is just amazing - really fresh, tasty noodle dishes - pretty different from the stuff you usually get. And they serve Vietnamese beers which are quite addictive! Apparently it's the first of its kind in London (that's what it says on the menu anyway) so it's good to have it in the area. Really good value, lovely little place - definitely recommend it.

**Editor's favourites:**

Brasserie Malmaison, Café du Marché and the Bleeding Heart. I also had good meals at reasonable prices recently at La Cucina in Cowcross Street and another brand new Italian restaurant – Santoré – at 59-61 Exmouth Market. This latter had only opened a couple of days previously. We were perhaps lucky on a balmy summer evening to be able to eat outside which, in such a lively location adds to the overall ambience – and the food was very good too! However I certainly haven't had the opportunity to eat at all the excellent restaurants in the neighbourhood and there are several of which I have heard very good things – notably the Club Gascon – Michelin starred, but pricey – Moro in Exmouth Market and perhaps Smithfield Tandoori which I know has many devotees among Barbican residents.