

# A Villa Somewhere

Villa 55's refined indoor elegance and shady garden setting make it a great place for the scorching summer days ahead

By Marwa Helal

**J**ust as pleasing as the food at Villa 55 is the atmosphere. Tucked away on Road 9 in Maadi, across from the popular American home-style eatery Lucille's, this garden restaurant is a great place to take a break from the city's roaring hustle and bustle. When considering ambience, the creative owners of Villa 55 seem to have thought of everything.

Upon arrival we were greeted by a valet who offered us a parking space in the restaurant's private driveway (the best part: you don't have to hand over your keys). Once parked, we walked through the garden's iron gates onto a charming cobblestone path. The wicker furniture, palm trees and lush grass in the outdoor seating area are reminiscent of a quieter time and place. Given that it was a hot, muggy day, my companion and I opted for the air-conditioned indoor area. We came upon an equally elegant and tranquil indoor setting: warm lighting over pale blue walls and dark, hardwood floors — framed by flowing, floor-to-ceiling white curtains and French doors. As a non-smoker, I'm pleased to report there is a distinct division between the smoking and non-smoking sections, enabling a truly smoke-free meal.

Then came the food: my companion started with a bowl of steaming French Onion Soup (LE 10) topped with a round of white bread. He described the soup as "having just the right amount of 'oniony-ness'." I set my sights on the Smoked Salmon (LE 39), which arrived on a large white oblong plate, garnished with lettuce, capers, mayonnaise and onions — leaving my guest and I to dress the chilled fish as creatively as we liked, making this my favorite part of the meal.

For the main course, I ordered the colorful Spanish Paella (LE 50). A steamed-to-perfection yellow rice with red peppers, calamari,

fish, shrimp — and the odd fried chicken drumstick — the perfect dish for someone who can't make up their mind (or someone doing a restaurant review). Meanwhile, my companion savored the Piccata Mushroom (LE 46). Though unimpressed by the side of fries, (perhaps rice would have been better) he was more enthusiastic about the main attraction: "It's rare for the mushroom sauce to be enough to make it through every bite of steak, so that was a nice surprise."

With little room left in our stomachs after the main course, we soldiered through dessert out of dedication to the readers (it's a tough job, but somebody has to do it). My guest asked for the rich Chocolate Brownie A La Mode (LE 21) and I went for the Tiramisu (LE 17). Dessert came out within minutes, both in the center of a white plate with (evidently) minimal effort put into presentation. The tiramisu wasn't really all that extraordinary: fluffy, velvety and sweet. It met, but didn't exceed, our expectations. The brownie was the better choice.

The option of indoor or outdoor seating at Villa 55 makes it a great place to grab a drink with friends in a quiet setting, when you actually want to be able to hear each other. Drinks-wise, tropical combinations dominated. I ended up with the Banana Havana (LE 15) a mixture of banana, orange and strawberry juice — very tasty and refreshing on a hot summer day. My companion tried the Virgin Mary (LE 11), which reportedly "had just the right amount of tabasco and spice."

Besides leaving with our stomachs full, the serenity of our surroundings left us feeling rejuvenated. Villa 55 is a yet-to-be-discovered chill spot in Cairo. Other patrons included



Villa 55, Maadi's newest eatery, offers something for all appetites. (Kim Piper/Egypt Today)

couples seeking some quiet time together, families enjoying the outdoor setting and businessmen chatting over sandwiches. Families will feel right at home; they've even created a kid's corner. Overall, the menu has something for everyone, the service is more than cordial — and you get your money's worth. This is a great place for anyone who's looking for good food or drink, and a break from it all — a must-try for the summer. *et*

Villa 55 • 55 Road 9 • Maadi • Tel: +2 (02) 735-0470 • Open 8am to Midnight • Prices are expensive to very expensive • Alcohol is not presently served pending the granting of a municipal license.