EPICUREAN EMPORIUM

The Guild at Dubai's ICD Brookfield Place flips the script on multi-venue dining

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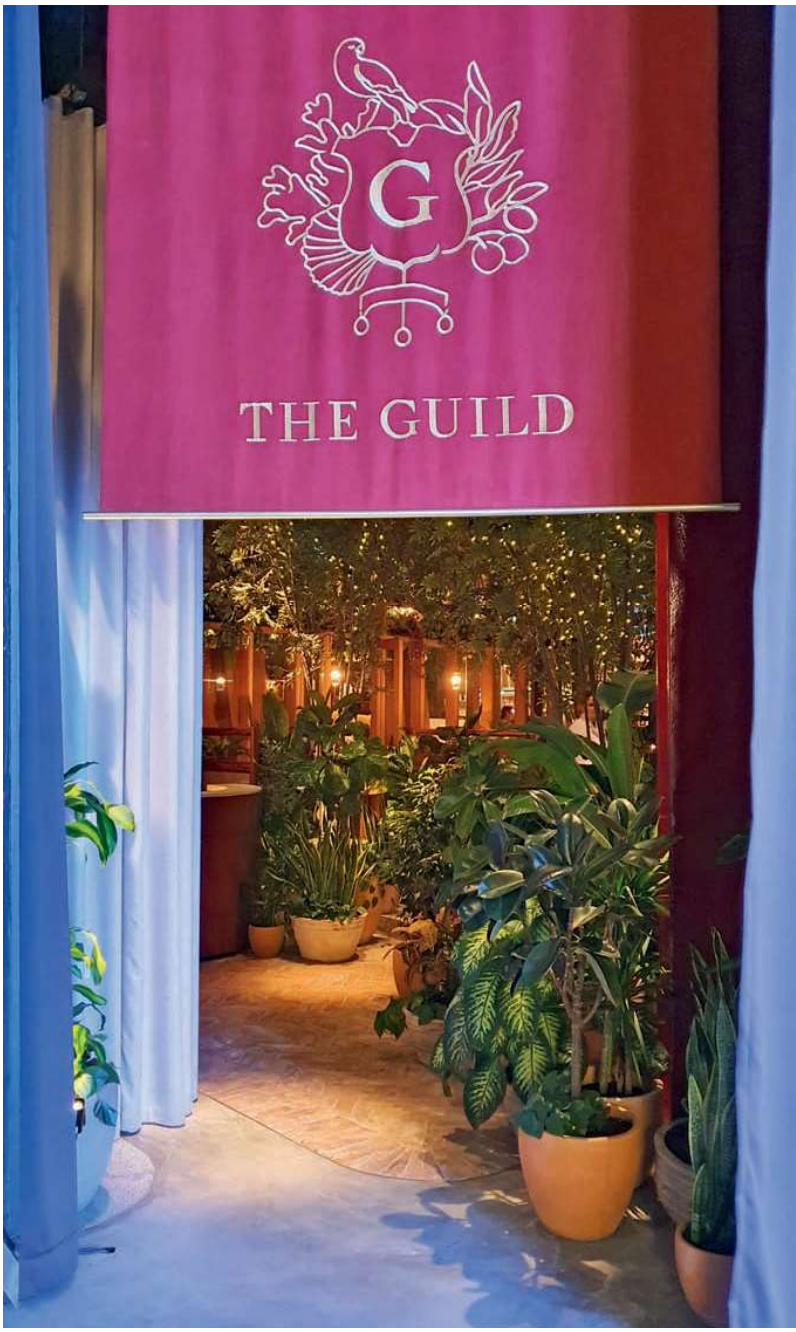
THE GUILD

LET'S BE CLEAR on one thing. Nobody is here to insult a global institution, especially one that likely holds myriad mealtime memories for us all, but it's fair to say that the Food Court concept probably gave the multiple-outlets-under-one-roof idea a bit of a bad rap. Understandably so. This grand old dame of communal dining from the 1970s and '80s is generally found at the backend of a tired mall somewhere, specialising in subpar food, harsh lighting and the general sound of chaos. Although venues such as the excellent Time Out Market have gone some way to redressing the balance in the intervening years, we're pleased to admit that The Guild, found on the ground floor of ICD Brookfield in DIFC, has us more than a little excited.

Of course we're not equating The Guild's five dedicated cafés and restaurants to a modern day food hall but, well, say 'different outlets in one place' to us and we simply batten down the hatches and await the plastic cutlery and buzzing handset flashbacks.

While The Guild will indeed hold five different areas for diners to enjoy, depending on their food mood – the Nurseries and Potting Shed (open Monday to Wednesday), the Rock Pool and Salon (Monday to Sunday), and Aviary yet to come – a gloriously organic, natural theme will also be complemented by smaller spots for pastries and bubbly... you know, the essentials.

This Tom Arnel-helmed project has taken almost five years to come to fruition and is spread out across a vast 17,000sqft of space. Each of the distinct areas is connected by a few steps, a little alley, or a small doorway. While it might not be quite at full tilt just yet, four of the five outlets are now open.

Amidst the foliage of the Nurseries you'll find an NYC Tribeca-style bohemian café experience. Potted plants bring a sense of cosy calm while twinkling fairy lights hang between creepers. You, meanwhile, are encouraged to stock up on breakfast delights ably supported by sourdough bread, or tasty treats such as pancakes and cinnamon French toast on a menu labelled Fancy Things. Meanwhile, the Menu du Jour serves you well during the afternoon – Sicilian tomato rigatoni, anybody?

Best advice? Before you dine make a beeline for the Potting Shed. Located next to the Nurseries, it's has all the earthy, plant-based feels too, but is a little more secluded. The perfect spot for an aperitif or a quick catch-up with friends.

At the Rock Pool, a haven of sustainably-sourced seafood is the star of the show. Featuring a 12-metre raw bar, an Oyster shucking station and dishes including North Atlantic lobster and King crab, simply perch on a chair facing the rock pool and enjoy the dance of the giant seaweed and crustaceans found within. The only note of caution we can offer here is to avoid dropping your phone over the side.

At the heart of The Guild lies the Salon, where dinner and no little theatrics are on offer. A tribute to the grand grills of New York and Europe, we love the open kitchen concept that means you get to see the Guild's chefs in action. Japanese wagyu, whole roasted French chicken with confit leg, truffle and roasted bone marrow and garlic snails, the list is mouth-watering, lengthy, and prepared before your very eyes.

Beyond all this finery, a word must go to the Snacks du Jour menu. Starring delicacies that moves effortlessly from Kelly oysters from Galway Bay, to a perfect King Crab tartelette, anchovies with pan con tomate, to a lobster roll, light bites are elevated.

But of course life isn't all seared tuna chu-toro. For those moments we recommend the aptly name Le Café, for when only a fine brew or spot of breakie will do – at least until 5pm, when it closes.

While not quite yet complete – bird-themed cocktail bar the Aviary will take flight soon – The Guild is already more than worth your time, with a whole host of rather charming venues all under one roof. Now all you need to do is decide which one to pick. ■

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