



A WARM PALACE

Not one of those run-of-the-mill watering holes, this. Dramz Whisky Bar & Lounge is a lifestyle concept—one that only epicures hooked to fine whisky will understand in its entirety. Located right there on the footsteps of Qutub Minar, it makes for a perfect setting for nursing a great whisky!

BY JUHI DUA



Dramz Whisky Bar and Lounge is meant for the finicky. If you are obsessive about sipping on your preferred spirit just the way you like it and in that apt glass, paired with European gourmet bites cooked and served to perfection, Dramz will pull you right in. Taking its name from the word dram—meaning a small drink of whisky—this place is a haven for whisky aficionados, but does not deserve to be limited to them alone. Maybe that's why the transition from fashion to interiors was smooth for Goel. Her company, La Sorogeeeka—an interesting combination of the names of her mom-in-law Saroj, father-in-law Jitender, and husband Kamal, has retained the interest of its discerning fans for over 30 years now. Satisfied with how her ambitious project has panned out, Goel says with a grin, "The fashion designer in me is still alive. I do study fashion forecasts while designing spaces."

AMBIENCE

Dramz probably has the most enviable location in the historically rich Qutub-Mehrauli area, adding to the colossal restaurant's colonial, old-world, regal charm. Divided in to four levels, it offers four varied experiences under one roof: A basement wine cellar that looks like it has been pulled out from a rustic European city, a chic whisky bar at the ground level, a European fine-dining

restaurant on the first floor, and a covered as well as all fresco setting on the second floor. And that really is the highlight. Imagine, sipping on your preferred poison, while absorbing the spellbinding view of the majestic Qutub Minar. While we chose to sit inside on the ground level, right next to the fireplace, courtesy the cold wave, and close enough to the bar, those five minutes spent on the terrace looking at the Qutub mesmerised me.

The wine cellar in the basement is enchanting, too. Taking in its refreshingly clutter-free interiors, strikingly offset by a long abstract painting, I instantly imagined throwing an intimate wine and cheese gathering here. But that stylishly earthy yet urbane décor ideology, I figured, runs through the bloodstream of the entire venue, and reminds one of the sophisticated Scottish palaces. Picture this—sepia coloured photographs systematically arranged on many a wall; a splash of art here or there, giving more character to the otherwise largely wooden interiors; an edgy furniture piece thrown in among a collection of intricately carved extravagant wooden stunners; and polished white stones making for the only décor element in the spacious bathroom. Dramz oozes with a warming appeal, and gets you in a comfort zone soon enough, making you feel as if you are sitting in your own living room. Cloudy lighting and jazz playing in the background only add to the mood.



DRINK, FOOD AND SERVICE

The bar is what Dramz prides itself the most on. Lined with an imposing collection of rare, limited-edition whiskies, some single casks and an array of interesting antique bar props, it instantly takes you on a whirlwind tour of various traditional bars across the globe. Some of the finest whiskies are served here—from Japan to Scotland and beyond, like Talisker 25, Hakushu and Glen Farclas 30. A few, though, are not currently available due to the shortage of supply, we are told. And yet, the collection including both single and blended variety, is magnificent, much larger than most other bars. The bar also stocks different glassware and ice cubes for each drink, giving it a specific Dramz character.

Dramz's head chef Pankaj says, "We feel that serving whisky is an art, that's why we have carefully chosen the ice cubes, the water and starters as well, to perfect your whisky-drinking experience."

The servers, too, are very prompt, well-informed and adept at suggesting a whisky or a bottle of wine as per your taste quirks. Really adept, if I must reiterate. I requested a coastal single malt, but not heavily peated like most of the Islay malts are, and the server returned with a 12-year-old Bunnahabhain—a Scottish, lightly peated Islay single malt. A fresh and aromatic single malt, it has just that hint of smokiness and finishes beautifully into a fruity, malty sweetness.

But it's not all about whisky, alone. The wine cellar stocks exquisite wines from around the world. And its best you stick to wine or whisky as their cocktails don't really match up. The classic whisky cocktail—Hot Toddy—was made to perfection though, but I do wish the bartender had strained it. However, the creative cocktails aren't worthy of a go. So don't give in to the allure of chic exotic names.

The food is an exquisite experience. The intriguing menu put together by Chef Pankaj and his team concentrates equally on vegetarian and non-vegetarian options, bar-special bites, and mains. He meticulously served us tasting portions, mostly from the bar menu, to complement our choice of whisky. We started with Stuffed Mushrooms, Parmesan Cheese, Porcini Dust, a flavourful start indeed. The porcini dust accentuated the earthiness of the mushrooms, making for a memorable new taste. This was followed by melt-in-the-mouth Chicken Envelops made of crisp, paper thin filo, served with a mildly hot chocolate sauce. Then came in an array of bites: Roasted Vegetables in Filo Pastry, the predictable but flawless Prawns tossed in Chilli Butter Emulsion, Painter's Palette-Three Dips Vegetable Fritters and the star of the evening... Stir-Fried Pork. The pork was served with dehydrated starfish, which basically was a fun-to-eat candied starfish. Most of the bites served had clean, crisp but lingering flavours, served with simple but flawless flair.

MENU STARS

Chef Pankaj shares the recipes for our favourites: Stir-Fried Pork, and Stuffed Mushrooms, Parmesan Cheese, Porcini Dust.

◀ STUFFED MUSHROOMS, PARMESAN CHEESE, PORCINI DUST

The simple earthiness of mushrooms, elevated with porcini dust and the richness of cheese, makes for great company with whisky, especially for those high on the smoky notes.

Serves 2

Ingredients

15 button mushrooms
30 gm dried porcini mushroom
20 gm dried shitake mushroom
150 ml cream (35% fat)
50 gm parmesan cheese
30 gm cheddar cheese
Salt to taste
50 gm finely chopped onion
20 gm garlic
5 gm crushed black pepper
2 gm fresh thyme
2 gm flat parsley

Method

1. Clean mushrooms with water and dry them with paper towels. Carefully break off stems.
2. Chop the mushroom stems, blanch the mushroom cap,

and keep aside.

3. Soak half of the porcini mushrooms in warm water and grind the rest of it to make a powder. Also, soak the shitake mushrooms in warm water to rehydrate.

4. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and chopped mushroom stems, chopped soaked porcini and shitake to the skillet. Fry until moisture evaporates.

5. Stir in parmesan cheese, cheddar cheese and chopped parsley in 50 ml of cream.

Using a little spoon, fill each mushroom cap with a generous amount of stuffing.

6. Prepare a mixture of the remaining cream and both the cheeses and put on top of the stuffed mushroom.

7. Bake for 10 minutes in the preheated oven or gratinate under a salamander until you get the desired colour on top.

8. Sprinkle the porcini powder on top of the mushrooms before serving.



STIR-FRIED PORK ▶

Pork is a rich meat. When combined with sharp spices, it makes for a perfect accompaniment with whisky.

Serves 2

Ingredients

400 gm pork belly
200 gm sliced onion
100 gm chopped carrot
2 star anise
500 gm chopped celery
50 gm chopped leeks
30 ml soya sauce
5 whole red chillies
100 ml refined oil
20 gm chopped fresh coriander
20 gm julienned ginger
10 gm chopped garlic

Method

1. In a heavy bottom pan, marinate pork belly with 100 grams sliced onion, chopped carrots, soy sauce, star anise,

leeks, whole red chillies, and 50 ml of oil.

2. Leave it to marinate for 3 hours.

3. Put the marinated pork belly in the oven at 120 °C and roast it for 3 hours. In between, check to see how done it is.

4. Once completely cooked, the meat will start falling apart.

5. Take the meat out of the oven, place it in a clean pan and let it cool down completely.

6. Once the belly is cold, cut 2cm x 2cm dices of the belly.

7. Heat oil in a thick bottom pan and add chopped garlic and remaining onion to the oil.

8. Add the diced pork belly to the pan and cook on very high heat for 2 minutes.

9. Add fresh coriander and some soya sauce for seasoning.

10. Serve hot. ■

