Moro 34/36 Exmouth Market, London EC1

20 Nov 2004 by JR

According to one of London's toughest and most successful literary agents there has never been a battle like it. Publishers were apparently falling over themselves to up the ante to secure the rights to the first Moro cookbook, which husband and wife Sam and Samantha Clarke, will produce in May 2001 for Ebury Press, the eventual winners.

Judging by a meal last week it is obvious to see why the Clarkes' innovative combination of the best of southern Spanish and North African cooking has proved so distinctive and popular and why their cookbook is likely to sell so well (although some of the seemingly simple dishes may involve more hours in the kitchen than many are led to believe is the norm with the Jamie Oliver school of cooking, for example).

All our food showed an intricacy of execution that will test but ultimately satisfy an amateur chef. A filo pastry brick filled with anchovy, egg and coriander; crescent-shaped sambouseks filled with spinach and pumpkin; wood-roasted skate wings with carrots, garlic and sherry vinegar; and spicy lamb cutlets with braised turnips, paprika and pinto beans. And despite three years' continued success, prices are still reasonable with the most expensive main course only £14.50.

But the proof of just what an exciting and sympathetic one-off Moro still is came after the desserts - a chocolate and apricot tart, an orange and almond torte and a highly refreshing yoghurt cake with pomegranate - when I pointed out to our waitress that there had been a pistachio shell in the yoghurt cake which probably wasn't supposed to be there. She was extremely apologetic and promptly took all the desserts off the bill - an approach sadly not practised in the Marco Pierre White empire.

Moro 34/36 Exmouth Market, London EC1, tel 020-7833-8336.
Open Mon-Fri 12.30-10.30pm; Saturday 6.30-10.30pm