

BUSINESS ENTITIES

Power Lunch: Coya's Members' Room New Lunch Spot for Elite Crowd

by Eleazar David Melendez

Over the heavy bronzed doors that separate the members-only section of Brickell's much hyped Coya from the bustling main dining room, an antique photograph shows the lords of some presumably long-lost Andean realm standing in ceremony. It's only fitting that such an image should look down upon the diners inside the friendly and sunny but fastidiously designed room, who have spent two grand just to get in: aristocrats of a legendary mountain domain at attention as the elite of a coastal one plan business empires over tiraditos and pisco.

Having opened in early March, Coya is boosted at the moment by a buzzy halo that's turned it into a must-go power lunch spot for Brickell. Backed by Arjun Waney, the same restaurateur involved in downtown Miami's Zuma and nearby Tamarina, Coya still has the shine of being the newest and greatest thing in town, an aura that will certainly impress some clients. So will the fact the Miami location is one of three across the world.

It's not for everyone: besides price, which might give second thoughts even to those with metallic-colored corporate credit cards, Coya is aiming at a palate that's above-average in its boldness—bankers who know their important client always orders pasta and salad at lunch might be ill-advised to experiment with them here. The main dining room that's tucked into the back of the restaurant is also not necessarily the best place to discuss deal terms, given the relatively high sound levels.

But the members' dining room, cozy, quiet and luxurious, is.

"Deals are getting done there," says Ari Tenzer, an attorney and founder of boutique firm Tenzer PLLC that's located a three-minute walk from the restaurant. Tenzer is

not completely impartial in his opinion, since Arjun Waney is a client, but he points out correctly the air of exclusivity and power the members' lounge evokes is invaluable.

"Everybody knows your name inside," he said. "Not everybody can get in."

Facing busy Brickell Ave. but separated from it by an also-private covered terrace, the design in the room mirrors the location across the Atlantic and the one in Dubai closely enough that jet-setters who've been at all three can play a game of "find the 10 differences." In this site, just like the one within walking distance of Buckingham Palace and the one in sight of the Persian Gulf, the members' lounge has its own bar, dedicated staff and an ambience that seems to dictate leisurely meals.

It goes beyond just the meal, says Tenzer, and is best suited toward those who want to "socialize, make friends, have a great meal and do business altogether."

"I've had meals in the members lounge that go on five hours and you go on the terrace afterwards and smoke a cigar," he said.

Coya's extensive menu also points toward biding your time.

Ceviches, tiraditos, causas and traditional salads, charcoal grilled anticuchos, seafood and meats all make an appearance, as would be expected on any Peruvian restaurant worth its salt. Yet there is no parallel to the food that comes out of the kitchen at Coya to, say, the excellent lomo saltados and octopus ceviches at Wynwood's SuViche or downtown's CVI.CHE 105.

In the manner worthy of a restaurant with locations on three continents, Coya takes the bones of Peruvian cuisine and dresses it with flavors rich and far-ranging.

The more disparate the flavors, the better the dishes seem to be at Coya.



Coya Restaurant located at 999 Brickell Ave.

Asparagus tacos with summer truffles are expertly calibrated to balance out the carb-rich sweetness of the tortillas, the green punch of fresh vegetables and the earthy nature of the mushrooms.

Similarly, the ceviches and tiraditos stand out the most when offering unorthodox combinations. A yellowfin tuna ceviche that combines fruity nature of the marinade with the meatiness of that fish becomes a veritable Japanese umami bomb dressed with brewed soy and ginger seeds. Going a different direction, a swordfish tiradito pairs the citrus with truffle oil and chives.

"It's kind of a good place for everything," said Kathryn Mikesell, a Miami technology consultant and notable local arts philanthropist. "The flavors were unique, and the drinks were interesting."

Maury Alzate, a broker with Florida Realty of Miami, said she's a fan of the salads. Like Tenzer she noted the atmosphere of the restaurant seems best suited for a hybrid between a business meal and a family one. She says she'll take clients there but is also planning a 15-person outing to honor her husband on Father's Day weekend.

Speaking of Tenzer, he likes the cazuelas: one-pot dishes served in seasoned cast iron that resemble Peru's take on paellas and are tossed tableside by attentive waiters. He says they're "to die for."

Anticuchos, marinated skewers of prawn, beef, fish, chicken or mushrooms don't fall far behind. In a recent visit, a reporter and two companions looked at each other warily when only two skewers were brought out, knowing one diner wouldn't be tasting the dish.

For those who might not have the leisure or the expense accounts, Coya has a \$29 prix fix lunch that delivers outstanding value. Another option, suggests Akerman managing partner Neisen Kasdin, is to take clients for a drink in the early afternoon. The pisco bar near the entrance of the restaurant faces a wall lined with jars of the traditional Peruvian liquor being infused.

Still, Kasdin suggests going for the high-rollers' room

"If you go, I think the important thing is that you go into the members section," he noted.

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