

The Catering industry is certainly not static in Riyadh. Increasing competition from the independents keep the hotels on their toes and most of the leading hotels in the city are currently gearing up for special events and general menu changes during the forthcoming Eid holiday period.

The new Executive Chef Franz Thiess has arrived at the Inter-Continental and recently catered a Swiss Food festival together with a colleague from the Montreux Palace Hotel in Switzerland. Franz is taking a short vacation in the Far East as I write, but I'm pleased to report the standards at the Verandah are more than adequately maintained by the Assistant Chef Peter who introduced me to a few new dishes from the menu last week. The beautiful weather we are now having has enabled the Verandah to lay up outside for a little al fresco dining. Those of you who have not yet tried out the Verandah should take a look at the competition alongside for a chance of a free meal!

Over at the Hyatt we wait to see what changes might occur now that Steve Ansell, the Food & Beverage Manager has moved on to his new position in Istanbul. Steven's e-mail address will eventually change to his new hotel but those of you wanting to contact the Ansell's in the interim can use clare_ansell@hotmail.com as an e-mail address.

Having mentioned Olivio's at the Hyatt and La Piazza at the Sheraton in the last edition, I was tempted to check out what other Italian restaurants there might be in town. My first stop was a place called Scalini.

With his background in catering supplies, the restaurant owner Saud Al Shaya has no problems in ensuring that all food served at Scalini is good and fresh. Scalini is the newest of the Italian restaurants in the city and is located on the DQ. Although that may be "out of the way" for some of you, its location does guarantee a degree of privacy and little extras like the background "musack". The access road is on the right just past the cash point following the second roundabout.

Saud's interests extend beyond the food, which is very good. He has actually designed everything from the décor to the chair you sit on which has been made locally to his own pattern. A three course meal consisting of shrimps in a mustard sauce, an excellent freshly made pasta dish together with sweet and coffee cost all of SR100. Designed with families in mind, service is quite relaxed and there is a men-only section, which extends to the patio when the weather is right.

Driving to Valentinos on Tahlia Street fully intent on checking out another Italian I was distracted by a bunch of red jacketed waiters waving down the cars that passed and directing them to a new restaurant just a few yards to the east. The new place, Rocky's, apparently opened earlier this year. (Tel: 293 2900) More than just fast food, the restaurant offers daily



Having a little fun with the cameraman are new F & B Manager Otto (seated) and Executive Chef Franz both newly arrived at the Inter-Continental.

specials for main meal options. A budget priced menu does offer sandwiches and burgers but there the similarity to a fast food outlet ends. Sandwiches come without chips in a sub-type roll. The bread is made to their own specification and is more western style than many of the sweeter types baked locally. Open from 7am for breakfast, the manager Michael Alameddine tells me that this is the first of a planned chain of outlets across the Kingdom. Rocky restaurants are apparently already a big hit in Canada where the concept was originally developed.

Travelling recently to Jeddah I was reminded of the delights of staying at the Al Bilad Hotel out on the north Corniche. Branded as a Movenpick restaurant the terrace dining now extends to the gardens where you can enjoy a Shisha if it takes your fancy. Every visit to the Al Bilad has always proved successful when it comes to dining and if you don't know the city it's a good bet if you have to entertain there. The soft opening of the Meridien will turn into a full launch shortly so there's bound to be some new food action in the not too distant. Watch this space.

In the Eastern Province many of you will know that what was the Oberoi is now the Sheraton and changes there are still on going. Recent service there was certainly up to the Sheraton standard. Change is the order of the day at the Carlton on the main drag, which is undergoing a refit as well. I've not had time to visit it but I'm told that a newish Italian on King Saud Street called Olivetos is worth a visit.

Note from the Editor: I'm currently updating the Riyadh in Focus pocket guide and should you discover a good food outlet not already included please let me know. Free meals on offer for recommendations leading to any Advertising business... AM

OUT ON THE TOWN