

A multi-sensory feast at Muizenberg's Cucina Labia

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

7 Feb 2018

It's easy to be charmed by the Cape Town suburb of Muizenberg. There's the seaside dotted with colourful beach huts and teeming with ardent surfers, the quaint coffee shops, and a casual coastal flair that suburbs along the Atlantic Seaboard stand little chance of replicating.

And there's food too. Good food. But despite my many ambles in the area, I had never quite made it to Italian-inspired restaurant Cucina Labia until very recently. Managed by Cape Town catering company, Dish Food & Social, the eatery is housed in the historic Casa Labia monument along Main Road.



Regal ambience

Built in the 1920s by the wealthy daughter of a Randlord and her Italian diplomat husband who wanted to reflect 18th century Venice in the design, the building's walls display original art from the likes of Irma Stern, Gerard Sekoto and Francois Boucher. Perhaps it was the venue's obvious sense of occasion that kept me away prior to my lunch visit, but any intimidation soon vanished when the friendly waitstaff encouraged us to explore the numerous adjoining rooms and its ornate interiors to our hearts' content.



We were seated inside for lunch, but al fresco dining is also available. Honestly though, any table is a good table at Cucina Labia. In between courses, you'll most likely be strolling between rooms admiring the décor and imagining yourself as guest at an upper-class soirée in another century.

To add to the regal ambience, on weekends there's a talented musician by the name of Jean-Paul Grimaldi-Lasserre playing the piano in the ballroom. How grand!



A twist on Italian favourites

Our waiter Warren ran us through the summer menu, pointing out his recommendations which in the end proved to be on point. Head chef Monché Muller is said to plan her menus by first drawing pictures of dishes and then writing the recipes that will produce them. The practice stems from her drawing the food she saw on TV as a young child, creating her own world of flavour and visual fantasy.

The menu is inspired by Italian favourites, but with an eclectic twist to them. For our first starter we chose the Tuscan salad – a mix of rocket, marinated tomatoes, olives, capers, brinjals and chickpea croutons, with dried peach and almond dressing – to which we added the optional crispy squid (R90). We also opted for the pistachio-pepper braaied tuna, served with grapefruit, artichoke caponata and watercress (R120). The tuna was a standout, but both dishes were a beautiful balance of delicate flavours that showcased Muller's creative use of fresh produce.



Braided tuna

For mains my partner tried the braised deboned beef rib, served with bone marrow jus, broccoli, gorgonzola pommes puree, cherry-smoked ox tongue and pear (R175). The beef was melt-in-your-mouth delicious, with the addition of the smoked tongue a surprising highlight. I selected the leg of lamb kataifi 'wellington' with almond, white anchovy, leek puree, fennel and bay leaf cream. What an interesting collection of textures this was, and the lamb itself was moreish and perfectly seasoned (R195).



Lamb kataifi 'wellington'

Be warned that the mains are rich, especially for a summer menu. The 'fish of the day' with Malay seafood crust, snoek, speck, apricot, pine nut, sweet potato and mange tout (R170) or the sumac tofu kataifi roll served with gem squash, smoked

tofu, beetroot, dukkah and basil (R115) looked to be the lightest out of the lot.

For dessert, we opted for the granadilla champagne mousse with pineapple, dulce de leche, chilli white chocolate soil, macadamia and mint (R80) as well as the deconstructed tiramisu (R80). The latter was a clear winner. Served with amaretti, espresso, chocolate and sabayon, it was decadent, dark and not too sweet, and deserving of its spot on *Eat Out's* top 5 list of [great tiramisus in Cape Town](#).



Deconstructed tiramisu

To wash it all down, we enjoyed a bottle of Hartenberg Chardonnay. While the wine list is well put together, some more options by the glass would have been welcome.

Overall, dining at Cucina Labia is a feast for the senses. Our lunch was thoughtfully curated, expertly prepared and beautifully presented, and to top it all off enjoyed in a uniquely elegant setting that is unmatched in the city. A spot of decadence along Muizenberg's historic mile worthy of a visit.

For more info visit [Cucina Labia online](#) and email cucinalabia@dishfood.co.za or call 021 788 6062 for reservations.

Lauren Hartzenberg dined as a guest at Cucina Labia.

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