



(Debbie Lampert/Eluna)

On the Fringe

• By DEBBIE LAMPERT
eLuna.com

The team spirit is alive and well at Fringe restaurant at the Jerusalem Theater. As you enter the building, look left, and there it is on the edge – the fringe – of the lobby.

Fringe is a dairy and fish restaurant for those who appreciate fine dining. From the presentation of the food to the combination of flavors, the professional service and the relaxed atmosphere, the restaurant is high-end while comfortable and not over-the-top. The culinary style is Middle Eastern with a nod to the Greek and Turkish kitchens.

Fringe, part of the Talbiye Group, is a team effort. "We are Yerushalmim and we love the city," says charming chef Nir Levi of his group, which includes several restaurants in the city.

A farm-to-table restaurant, Fringe uses only locally sourced ingredients. The fish is fresh from Israel's long coastline, the cheese is from local dairies, and the fruit and vegetables are all grown on the lands around Jerusalem. Wines are almost all Israeli.

There are two strategies for dining at Fringe Restaurant. If you like to taste a variety of different dishes, you can design your own tasting meal from the "Light Bites" and "From the Sea" menus. These dishes vary in size, and most can be shared by two diners. A selection of 5-6 starters can add up to about NIS 350. Alternatively, you can do the traditional single

starter for two, and a main course for each diner, for about the same cost.

On our visit to Fringe Restaurant, we went with the variety and chose a selection of the restaurant's starters and fish dishes. This gave us an introduction to the chef's virtuosity. The Light Bites signature dish is the very tasty Grilled Shoshka peppers with homemade labaneh balls. This is a colorful dish and a crowd-pleaser. But my favorite was the Fish confit with tzatziki and olive oil (NIS 48). This was reminiscent of American white fish salad, but with the chef Levi flare.

Fish that is well prepared is a delight, and the folks at Fringe do it well. My favorite was the crusty bite-size Red Mullet (Barbounia) (NIS 46). There are but two small fish in this starter, so if you are sharing, you will have to give one of them up to your dining companion. My companion was far more smitten with the Pickled Sardines (NIS 54) and the Phyllo pastry with Swiss chard (mangold) (NIS 62). To each his own, which is another advantage of a tasting menu.

If you think you can manage a main course after all those amazing starters, the restaurant recommends the Sofrito. This is a unique dish of slow-cooked Jerusalem artichokes in a Mediterranean sofrito sauce. The stew is covered with roasted eggplant mousse and baked in the tabun oven. Dig in to an impressive mound of this steaming dish.

The Fringe bar is what you would expect in this caliber restaurant. We had two lovely cocktails: a light frothy yogurt-based cocktail for the lady, and a gin and tonic for the more practiced drinker. Fringe adds cinnamon, mint and fruit juice to this drink, a sophisticated and pleasant addition. There is also a nonalcoholic cocktail for the designated driver.

Our 11th commandment of restaurant dining is never to pass up dessert in a dairy restaurant.

We enjoyed the tangy frozen yogurt topped with fresh fruit. If you prefer to end your meal on a sweeter note, the crumble cake with a fruit glaze will do it. All the desserts for all the restaurants in the Talbiye Group are made at the Talbiye Patisserie in the theater, on the floor above Fringe.

In addition to the clever menu, the lovely atmosphere and the delicious foods, Fringe has one more important ingredient: the team spirit. Whereas most restaurants have a staff of hired individuals, the folks at Fringe are a team, working together for years, all part of the Talbiye Group. There is a great deal of harmony between them, which made our visit to Fringe a culinary adventure and not just a dinner for two.

Fringe

20 David Marcus Street, Jerusalem Theater, Jerusalem

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Open Sunday-Thursday, 6 p.m.-11 p.m. Closed Friday and Shabbat.

Kashrut: Jerusalem Rabbinate

The author, founder and CEO of eLuna.com, the premier English-language website for kosher restaurants in Israel, was a guest of the restaurant.