

A CHEF YOU MUST KNOW

A new wave of talented chefs is revolutionizing Istanbul's bustling culinary scene, making Serica and Hiema worth visiting, not just for their unique flair but also their warm and welcoming attitude



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Getting to know Chef Yiğit Alıcıoğlu, whose dishes I experienced for the first time, was a delightful surprise for me. This young chef leading the kitchen at Serica Restaurant thrilled me with dishes like velvety octopus and fresh artichokes, evoking an excitement I had not felt in a long time.

The first dish you are served sets the tone for the entire evening, and this rule never fails. That is exactly what happened at Serica; when I tasted the marinated sea bass from Yiğit Alıcıoğlu, I got even more excited about the upcoming dishes. Serica, located on the top floor of The Bank Hotel at Bankalar Street in Karaköy, is a small, stylish, cozy and friendly restaurant with an amazing view. It seems foreigners discovered it before us, as it was packed with high-quality tourists when I visited. The talented chef previously worked at the Alaçatı and İstanbul branches of Alancha, Toi, Steeve and Relae in Copenhagen, which is one of the best in the world.

Yiğit's dishes have a simplicity that avoids the chaos of trying to showcase everything at once. Yet, this simplicity literally turns the other way around on the palate, turning into a festivity that makes you feel all kinds of taste combinations.

I think it is important to understand how flavors work together in different cuisines, and of course to be able to make that work with your local ingredients. Let us talk

about the first dish that will make you taste all these amazing things. They take sea bass, slice it super thin, and then marinate it in a mixture of lime juice, lemon juice, garlic and coriander seeds for like 30 seconds. It is like what they call "tiger milk" in Peru. Then they add some molasses and chili pepper to the mix, and top it all off with green plums. It is like a party in your mouth with sour, sweet, and bitter flavors all at once!

The next dish was what they cooked fresh artichokes from Urla with lots of olive oil and orange juice. When serving it, they topped it with artichoke puree made with extra orange juice and crispy snow peas and drizzled it with pea sprouts and dill oil. It is a dish that wakes up your taste buds and really lets you taste the freshness of the ingredients. One of the standout dishes for me was the velvety octopus, which had a texture like Turkish delight.

Personally, I'm not a big fan of how the Greeks prepare octopus. Yes, it will be a bit tough on the tooth, but it will not make you tired while chewing and will allow you to feel the taste. Grilled octopus, which has been properly processed and cooked to this exact consistency, is served with a puree made from İspir's beans and Konya's double-roasted tahini. This mixture is a reference to Antalya's piyaz with some hummus and some vinegar added. İspir's beans cooked with sausage oil are also sprinkled on the plate to add flavor.

Since angler fish is soft-fleshed, lean, white and firm-textured, not many restaurants grill it. Chef Yiğit took a risk here and grilled the angler fish. The angler fish, which was cooked much juicier and more delicious than I expected, was served with blessed thistle cooked in olive oil and bacon veloute sauce. One of the most special things about the kitchen is that they have a very good tandoor. Breads and a few types of flat bread come out of this tandoor.

The tandoor flatbread with tangazola cheese, mallow and nettle from Tangala Farm is a must-try. When you go to Serica, do not forget to enjoy the seashore bar upstairs before or after your meal.

Friendly demeanor, cozy interior charms at Hiema

Burak Fındık is one of the hidden stars in the restaurant scene, known for his friendly demeanor, humility, and menus tailored to the restaurant's theme and customers. Chef Burak is now cooking at Hiema, a nightlife hotspot gaining popularity after his stints at Pizza Emirgan and Upstairs above it. Located in Armutlu, Hiema charms visitors with a cozy courtyard surrounded by cacti and lush greenery. Inside, the stylish decor sets a unique ambiance that transforms as the evening progresses, with music enhancing the social atmosphere from 10 p.m. If you visit Hiema in the evening (they also serve lunch), I recommend arriving early to enjoy the garden, then the music and finally savor Chef Burak's dishes, such as glazed leer fish, shrimp and truffle ravioli, and cacio e pepe, best shared with friends.



This photo shows a stunning bird's-eye view of the Bosphorus from the terrace seating area of The Bank Roof Bar, a cozy yet stylish venue situated in the heart of Karaköy's Bankalar street in Istanbul.

