



Alfred Hitchcock revisited

# SPY GAMES





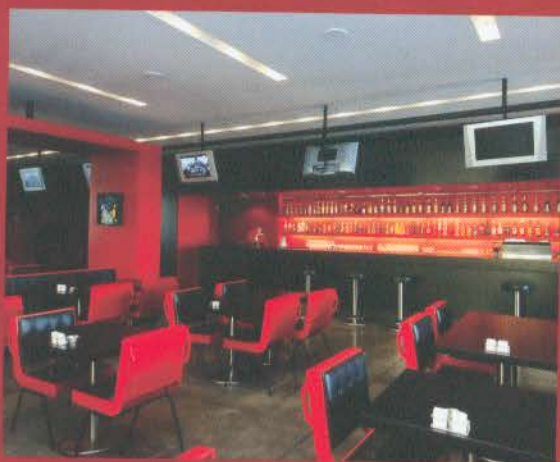
**THE BLACKBOX**  
ENIGMA





There's something innately gothic about BlackBox, despite its bold geometric design, its absence of curves and odd corners and turrets of any kind. Of course this is a lot to do with its no-nonsense decor, the exclusive use of Dracula-esque, bright blood red and midnight black colors, which are totally in your face in an utterly 21st-century way, but which draw inspiration from other less design-conscious, secretive and sensational times.





Designed by Bernard Khoury, architect of the fantastically gothic B018, this chic modern-day horror house-cum-roadside diner (not an easy thing to pull off) theme is in keeping with everything else he's done, and as always, Khoury's details are eye-catching: the deeply embedded alcoves on the terrace, in that definitive Dracula red, which are soft, elegant and as large as vast beds, and a gigantic bright blood red leather swing on the BlackBox terrace, big enough for a small crowd to sit on all at once. Everything is just a little, sometimes a lot, oversized, which gives a dream-like, faintly hallucinogenic impression that is at once disorientating and immediately addictive.

Outside on the terrace, the details are all on display, but the mood is more subtle, perched as it is on the cusp of the sea, with an understated pebble pool wall overlooking the Mediterranean, which brings with it a Zen-like serenity that is the perfect complement to the zaniness of the interior. A place like this could be in danger of appealing only to a younger crowd, but according to Floor Manager Roula Aoun, BlackBox attracts an eclectic mix of people, including young, young kids (and there are swings and slides for them), 30-somethings, families as well as, of course, those hipsters, and just about anyone else you'd care to mention.

The BlackBox menu is as streamlined as its design, offering reasonably priced salads, burgers and pizzas, which are served with a casual style and elegance.

My dining companion and I were joined for dinner by an eminent Parisian artist, who prefers to remain anonymous. She admired the

design of BlackBox as she sipped her vermouth elegantly and as we tucked into a selection of appetizers: some fat potato wedges, which came with a variety of dips, including cholesterol-free mayo and supremely good chutney.

We also tried some tasty cheese and vegetable rolls and a few *panzarotti*, which look like Lebanese *sambusek* and were stuffed with fresh mozzarella, tomatoes and basil.

There was pizza and pasta, and even quesadillas to be had on the menu, but we decided to opt for more solid fare, being by the sea seemed to require it (I really don't know why). My lovely dining companion went for fish and chips, which sadly did not come with vinegar or in newspaper, but which were just as hearty all the same. The Parisian artist opted for the chicken *escalope*, served with fries, which she pronounced to be just fine. I chose the teriyaki salad, which came with marinated beef filet, grilled peppers and a sesame and orange soya dressing, which was delicately tangy and quite original.

BlackBox serves informal and diner-type fare with a certain special flair, but more than that, we all agreed, its design elevates the place to something quite mesmerizing. The Parisian artist wondered whether there was anything like this in her native city but we said, no, only in Beirut (being only a little biased) could you find such a delightful mixture of styles and themes. A gothic diner? Go see it for yourself.

For more info, tel.: 04/725-725.

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