

# citybites

By Justin Thomas

## THE MEAT CO

Toys R' Us, The Tie Rack, and The Sock Shop all follow the pragmatic, but rather unimaginative, "does-what-it-says-on-the-tin" school of naming. This no-nonsense approach avoids the cryptic word play that can often leave consumers confused as to the exact nature of a business. These straight-laced names spare us the easy-to-miss mythology wrapped up in names like "Apple", "Oracle" and "Nike". They also spare us business names loaded with adolescent wackiness — Mr. Branson's "Virgin" springs immediately to mind. Furthermore, these simple descriptive names protect us from the eponymous narcissism conveyed by the businesses bearing their founder's moniker: Chanel, Hilton, and most grandiose of all "Marc by Marc Jacobs". These more practical business names are honest, humble and reassuringly simple. They realistically shape our expectations while subduing our wilder imaginings.

**THE MEAT CO AS THE NAME SUGGESTS, PROUDLY FOLLOWS THIS CUSTOMER-FRIENDLY NAMING TRADITION. WELL BEFORE EVER SETTING FOOT IN THE MEAT CO YOU ALREADY HAVE A PRETTY GOOD IDEA OF WHAT TO EXPECT... I WAS THINKING BIG STEAK ON A BED OF STEAK IN A CREAMY STEAK SAUCE, WITH A T-BONE TIRAMISU TO FOLLOW.**

Abu Dhabi's Meat Co (my destination for the evening) is part of a steakhouse chain spanning three continents. This particular link in the global Meat Co chain is located within Souk Qaryat Al Beri. The restaurant is excellently situated within the souk commanding great views of the Arabian Gulf, which is perhaps one of the most beautiful non-human dining companions in the world. At certain times of the day this body of water becomes a super-natural shade of blue, almost bordering on turquoise. I call this particular hue, "travel-brochure blue"; it's the type of blue that less scrupulous travel agents recreate using Photoshop to artificially enhance their product.

Exteriors aside, the Meat Co's interior decor is best described as forgettable minimalism. On the plus side, there's little in the way of pastiche or attention grabbing gimmickry. One exception to the unremarkable "blandscape" is a striking tower-like edifice constructed entirely of wine bottles (a leaning tower of vino, if you like). The bottles-everywhere vibe gives the impression of dining in a wine cellar. This theme is perhaps a little disconcerting for more devout Muslim clientele, and I suspect recovering alcoholics find it slightly problematic too? I discovered later that the wine bottle tower is actually a signature design feature of all the Meat Co restaurants; in fact, the London link in the Meat Co chain is officially known as the Meat and Wine Co.

Another outstanding feature of the Meat Co is that the entire table staff (the men at least) all appear to be of South African origins. One of my dining companions impressively spoke a few words of Zulu, so we were able to confirm this hunch. In a nation where the vast majority of table staff is Asian, this impressive team of Africans, not a man shorter than six foot, is a pretty remarkable sight. My inner psychologist couldn't help wonder

about the motivation for such a hiring policy. My companions suggested nepotism; the idea being one guy rises to the top, and thereafter only recruits his nearest and dearest — possible? However, I think the situation is more likely to be the result of a psychoanalytic motivational researcher suggesting some hitherto unfathomable subconscious connection between huge steaks and African table staff.

This idea is not as off-the-wall as it might sound. Psychoanalysis has been leveraged by the business world for well over half a century in attempt to discover consumers' hidden fears, desires and motives. In the 1950s motivational researchers suggested to American Airlines that they recruit only middle aged air hostesses, as this would tap into their customers' mother complexes. Earlier still in the 1920s Edward Bernays, nephew of Sigmund Freud, and father of PR helped the American Tobacco Company boost sales of cigarettes to women.

His cunning plan involved getting waspish twenty-something females to pose as members of the suffragette movement, and defiantly smoke their "torches of freedom" (cigarettes) in public. Who knows what effect the Meat Co's table staff is having on the unconscious minds of its diners? Wild psychological speculations aside, the Meat Co was founded by two of South Africa's most successful restaurateurs, and describes its self as 'contemporary African'. This probably provides the simplest explanation for the distinctive table staff.

Like the Meat Co's table staff, the menu too is large. However, if it's your first time at the Meat Co then you're probably going to go with the beef. Surprise, surprise we all ordered steaks, but none of us were carnivore enough to take on the 500 gram bad-boy, opting instead for variations on the 300 gram theme: T-bone, rib eye, well done, medium rare. The steaks were all excellent, possibly the best steak I'd ever eaten.

That said, I very rarely eat steak, so my field of comparison is not large. There are alternatives to steak on the menu; seafood, lamb and chicken all make appearances, however I felt totally and utterly compelled to have steak, compelled perhaps by unconscious urges... who knows.



DISHES FOR DUMMIES

MINI BANANA SPLIT BITES

By Angeli Castillo

1. Use firm bananas and cut into 1 inch sections. Leave the peel on for easy handling, and then dig a "well" in the middle of each banana section with enough thickness for the ice cream and goodies to stay in place inside. Remove the peel after doing so.
2. Melt chocolate (chocolate Hershey's Kisses or baking chocolate from Carrefour) in the microwave and dip the bottom portion of the banana in chocolate and then dip it once again in whatever add-ons you'd like. For example- sprinkles, crushed biscuits, crushed roasted almonds etc. To quickly harden the chocolate, place dipped bananas in the freezer for a few minutes.
3. Fill each "well" with ice cream and top with whip cream and even a maraschino cherry, or simply add some Hershey's chocolate sauce.
4. ENJOY!

RATING SCALE:



LEVEL 1: SUPER EASY

LEVEL 2: RELATIVELY EASY

LEVEL 3: MEDIUM SKILLS REQUIRED

LEVEL 4: COOKING SKILLS A MUST

LEVEL 5: ARE YOU SURE YOU WANNA DO THIS?