

## Reviews

### Barça



★★★★★

#### Raising the (tapas) bar

After hearing a friend bemoan the fact that many local restaurants are preparing Spanish food with Albert Heijn ingredients, I hoped Barça, the tapas place in De Pijp, would deliver the real goods with a little more ingenuity. Reopened in May after a complete renovation, Barça (short for Barcelona) now sports a streamlined interior with a minimum of fuss and decor and a revamped menu of inventive Mediterranean dishes.

Grabbing a table across from the bar, home to a vast array of wine and liquor, we enjoy a sweeping view of Marie Heinekenplein. It's a simple space decorated in black and red with fringed lamps, dark wood panelling and leather seats. The room is generic enough that it can easily transition from eatery to watering hole as the night lengthens. We're seated by a server who's friendly, even by international standards – smiling, laughing and guiding us through the lengthy menu of tapas and a few mains, including a surprising number of veal dishes.

It takes a while to decide what to order, so we settle on the 'Plata de Barça', a mixed sampler to try a little bit of everything, plus an enticing-sounding pumpkin tortilla and bread with aioli. Just minutes later, our table is piled with dishes: small portions of the bread with aioli, olive tapenade and tomato salsa, three *montaditos* and three *tostados* (slices of bread with various toppings), plump meatballs in tomato sauce, a feta and spinach pie and a bowl of chicken wings.

We begin with the tortilla, a slice of fluffy Spanish omelette covered with a dollop of yoghurt-feta sauce. Its slightly sharp flavour is an excellent match for the sweet egg and pumpkin. The fresh bread with tangy tomato salsa is a nice palate cleanser before I move on to the substantial chicken wings. I can't quite decipher the complex flavour of the spicy-sweet marinade and ask the waitress to reveal the secret. She makes haste to the kitchen to and reports back that it's a mix of paprika,

coriander and honey.

The spinach pie, a phyllo pastry with whole spinach leaves and hunks of feta, is delightfully fresh. We round things out with an order of potato wedges in garlicky aioli. No Appie deep-fried chips; they're hand-cut and golden on the outside with tender centres and crisp brown edges. The aioli is potent and creamy.

The mackerel spread, served on a toasted slice of bread, overpowers us: it's strong, fishy and reminiscent of a canned fish sandwich; a jolt after the refined flavours of the accompanying dishes. The sweet potatoes with smoked salmon, also served on a small piece of baguette, are an unexpected treat, though. Blended into a chunky spread, the earthy potatoes play off the sharp taste of the fish and the bread is lightly toasted, giving the dish just enough crunch. Barça chefs make a point of using the best ingredients, sourcing many of their goods from Spain, and use biological produce and meats whenever possible. The care given to quality of ingredients is replicated in the kitchen as well and the extra effort isn't hard to detect.

**Barça** Marie Heinekenplein 30-31 (470 4144/barca.nl). Open Sun-Thurs 11:00-01:00; Fri, Sat 11:00-03:00. Credit AmEx, MC, V. Hallie Engel

BARÇA	
1 PLATA DE BARÇA	36.50
1 TORTILLA PUMPKIN	4.50
1 POTATO WEDGES WITH AIOLI	4.00
1 GLASS RED WINE	3.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48.00</b>



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