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Vapiano breaks through London

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Vapiano, a new Italian concept, has launched in London this month and is offering diners a new chip card system, allowing them to create their own dining experience.

The chip card technology, which is new to the UK, will keep track of each person's personal total of selected dishes and drinks over the evening.

On arrival, each customer will be provided with a simple blank chip card which they then swipe at each station where their food has been prepared.

Once finished their meal, customers go to the till point where their card's total will be printed off, ready to pay.

Similar to its sister restaurants in areas including Germany, Austria and North America, customers can become more involved in the creation of their meal as they order directly from the chef who prepares their food in approximately two minutes. There are two woks per station, serving two meals at once.

Mary McLaughlin, the chief executive officer of Vapiano restaurants who showed the London Source around the venue at the launch party last week, commented on the idea behind this: "People are becoming more and more aware of what is in their food and the fact that guests can see the chefs freshly preparing their food, makes the even more unique and all part of the experience."

Culinary head chef Tracey McKenna, who has previously worked for the La Tasca restaurant chain for seven years, oversees her team of 15 chefs serving up nine different pastas. These include Funghi (Mixed Mushrooms, Cream Sauce), Tacchino Piccante (Chicken Breast, Orange Chilli Sauce, Pak Choi, Bell Peppers), and Granchi Di Fiume (Crayfish, Vegetables, Lobster Sauce).

Pizza dishes on offer include Gamberi E Rucola which consists of King Prawns, Rucola, Olives, and Tomatoes, Tonno, featuring Tuna Fish, Onions, Tomatoes and Mozzarella, and Pesto Con Sinaci, which consists of Spinach, Pesto, Cream Sauce, Tomatoes and Mozzarella.

The 300-cover eatery prides itself on serving freshly prepared food daily. Every dish is complemented with fresh herbs from the restaurant's herb garden.

Mary described the eatery as "more than just a self-service venue. It is somewhere that appeals to everybody. It is relaxing, unique and has almost a continental, contemporary feel to it. There is no structure to the restaurant, but this is all part of the experience."

Italian interior architect Matteo Thun has created a casual, relaxed atmosphere by using smooth light oak wood and soft earth-toned leather.

Other design features include large glass fronts for natural light, creating a sense of openness, cool marble walls and natural stone.

Mary went on to give a final comment on the finished touches of the restaurant: "I am delighted with it. It's a new concept to London and is a step ahead from other restaurants. We are also currently in talks about launching six other venues within the UK. Nothing is to be confirmed yet."

Average spend for a meal at Vapiano including wine is between £9-10. The venue, which accommodates up to 300 diners, serves food from 11 through to midnight every day.

Weblink: www.vapiano.co.uk