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Cypriot-born food critic at centre of online review spat

By **Nicole Zeniou**

A Cypriot-born food critic has been at the centre of an amazing online spat prompted by her review of a Dubai restaurant.

Samantha Wood, 39, developed a keen following with her online reviews of eating places in the Gulf state, which is spoiled for choice for high class dining establishments.

But her review of one eatery in the Gulf state led to her gain fame far further afield and be at the centre of the most-viewed story on the Daily Telegraph newspaper website on October 27.

Italian chef Andrea Brambilla was incensed by the blog on foodiva.net, about Dubai's Meydan Beach Club, an offshoot of the Michelin 3-star Giannino restaurant in Milan. Although she had enjoyed the meal she had commented on the price. It had cost her and her companion – another Italian chef Maurizio Pelli – more than €250.

Brambilla told Wood to "Go please to other restaurants in other locations, check them out but don't forget to wear first a condom on your tongue in order [to] contain the orgasm of your ignorance."

Wood, who moved to Dubai in 1999 from London, praised the food but complained about the scant wine list and the authenticity of the Milanese dishes.

She ended her review by saying she was horrified by the prices with main courses costing up to €53 each, saying: "The food may have impressed but for a beach club location

on a casual strip of Dubai where the service requires fine-tuning, Giannino is pricing itself out of this market and potentially out of diners."

A day after her blog post, the scathing reply was posted by the chef commenting on her review making statements such as: "The only squash at the table was attached to your neck."

The row sparked a flood of traffic to Miss Wood's website, with many supporting the blogger.

Andrew Christon, manager of the beach club, said, "His opinions are his own and are in no way representative of our team," and has invited everyone who posted a comment to dine for free at Giannino.

Samantha told The Cyprus Weekly that she was very intrigued by his initial comments on the food, but naturally shocked by his language, "to the point that I just laughed, only to realise he was the chef de cuisine, from Giannino in Milan and from what I could understand, had not spent much time in Dubai, if any."

In her reply to Brambilla she posted: "In all fairness, my main issue with the dining experience was the price, the food did in fact impress as I emphasised, all kudos to the chef and kitchen team.

"I like to think my reviews are professional, constructive and balanced, at the end of the day Foodiva is here to support the growth of the F&B industry not to destroy it. I always encourage and appreciate constructive feedback," she added.



This was the first time a chef had reacted to her blog with such colourful language.

She added that chefs posted on her blog and have expressed their anger at Brambilla's reaction as it sets a bad example for their industry.

Samantha said she is waiting for a public apology. "Meydan, the operators of Giannino Dubai have responded on www.foodiva.net with a statement on my review, but as of now I have heard nothing from the Milan operation, let alone an apology."

However, she does admit that the row has drawn atten-

tion to the site, thanks to it being reported not just in the Telegraph but in the Daily Mail and the Corriere della Sera

"It's every blogger's dream to have a post go viral, espe-

cially one that brings in such tremendous support to the reviewer so, naturally, I am ecstatic with the coverage."

Go please to other restaurants in other locations, check them out, but don't forget to wear first a condom on your tongue in order contain the orgasm of your ignorance.

All the above is direct also to all "professors" that without having a clue of what they are talking about they keeping: writing, twitting, facebooking.

Guys get a life!

Andrea Brambilla
Giannino Milano

Fashionista turned food blogger

Wood is half British and half Cypriot, her father is in the hotel business and she was born in Cyprus, but has travelled all over the world, thanks to her dad's work.

She studied fashion design before moving into a public relations career initially in the fashion industry in London, and then in Dubai within the hospitality and food and beverage (F&B) market. She then worked in the hospitality industry for over a decade.

"Living and breathing in hotels around the world, I have developed a good sense for what makes or breaks a dining experience," she told The Cyprus Weekly.

As a result of her long time fascination with restaurant reviewing, early last year, she set up her own business in Dubai, with Foodiva (www.foodiva.net), a blog dedicated to impartial restaurant reviews and food features. At the same time she also freelances as a food jour-

nalist, judges F&B awards, and provides communications consultancy and training. She is also currently an Editor-at-Large for the UAE's Gourmet magazine "where I contribute regular food features and a monthly col-

umn, and I have also started writing culinary travel articles for The National, the UAE's leading newspaper." She set up her blog in Dubai because "it had a real gap for an online resource dedicated to impar-

tial restaurant reviews."

She added: "Dubai's dining out scene is booming, fuelled by a primarily expat population and with the advent of social media more and more people are turning to blogs for impartial opinions." She does want to expand her blog abroad and in Cyprus.

"Cyprus is my birthplace and original home so naturally I have a huge affinity to the island.

"The restaurant scene is also growing there, albeit on a smaller scale. My readers are not only Dubai-based residents, but business travellers and holidaymakers from around the world, Cyprus included, who are looking for restaurant recommendations when planning their trip.

"I also review restaurants on my travels. I have plans to expand Foodiva to other cities and countries, so you never know perhaps one day in Cyprus!"