

The Mouth

By Nanci Tangeman

Nature's grandeur

Grand Cafe De Bosbaan
Bosbaan 4, Amsterdamse Bos
404 4869
Kitchen open 11.00-22.00
Bar/cafe open 10.00-00.00
Cash, PIN, credit cards

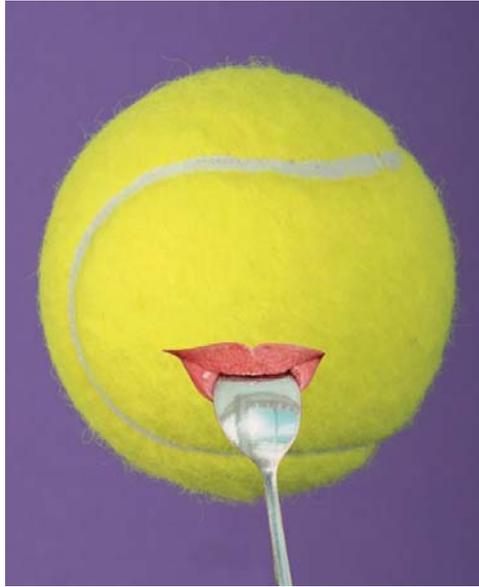
The fireplace beckons. I can see the flames through the rain-dotted windows. It looks cosy inside Grand Cafe Bosbaan. There's something comforting about rain and fireplaces. And the location of the building, within the Amsterdamse Bos, one of the largest parks in Europe, doesn't hurt either. Since our tennis game's been rained out, my Worthy Opponent and I head inside.

The beckoning fireplace turns out to be a flatscreen TV, but weirdly, its effect is the same as a crackling, roaring hearth. We sit at one of the many tables overlooking the Bosbaan, the 2200-metre course that's home to the Dutch Olympic rowing team. It feels comforting, like a big easy chair.

Not comforting, however: those prices staring back from the menu. North Sea plaice in cream sauce is €29.90. A meal-size tuna salad is €16.60 and kip sate is €19.50. Even fries are €3.90 per portion. The Heineken, though, comes in three sizes (€2.30, €2.50, €4.30) to fit any budget. We stick to the cheaper end of the menu.

Even that's not exactly inexpensive. This place is turning out to be more 'grand' than 'cafe'. The mid-day, mid-week crowd is mostly business people. Not many rambler or rained-out athletes like us. I guess the name of the place should have tipped us off.

My Opponent orders an *uitsmijter* with cheese (€10.50). I opt



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for the warm Panini with mozzarella, tomato and pesto (€6.10). I can smell the basil and garlic of the pesto before it hits the table. The bread is warm and soft and the cheese is melted just-so on the tomatoes. Opponent's *uitsmijter* is, well, an *uitsmijter*. But at least she's had no problem getting the kitchen to substitute brown bread.

They don't make a habit of substitutions, however. On a previous visit, Opponent asked if the kitchen could put cheese on her hamburger (€8.10). No problem. On her next visit she asked, but they apologised. 'It just wasn't possible'.

The Grand Cafe Bosbaan is one of several restaurants within the 1000 hectare Amsterdamse Bos—and it's definitely the poshest. Still, weary rambler fresh off the 137 km of footpaths or cyclists resting from the 51 km of bike paths shouldn't feel like they can't stop in for a bite. In fact, there are handy lockers (€1, refundable) right outside the cafe to store your gear while you're exercising.

But we're certainly not exercising. The rain refuses to quit and, for once, I'm okay with that. Better to sit and read the dessert menu—chocolate mousse, lemon tart with raspberry ice cream, *soesjes* with vanilla ice cream and chocolate sauce (all €6.50)—than to return to the courts where Opponent would clean my clock. And besides, the video fire is growing on me.

There is one important bit of information that's not on the menu. The area upstairs is available for events. They even offer special 'condolence packages'. If the rain ever stops and we get back on the tennis court, I just may need to schedule one of those. _____