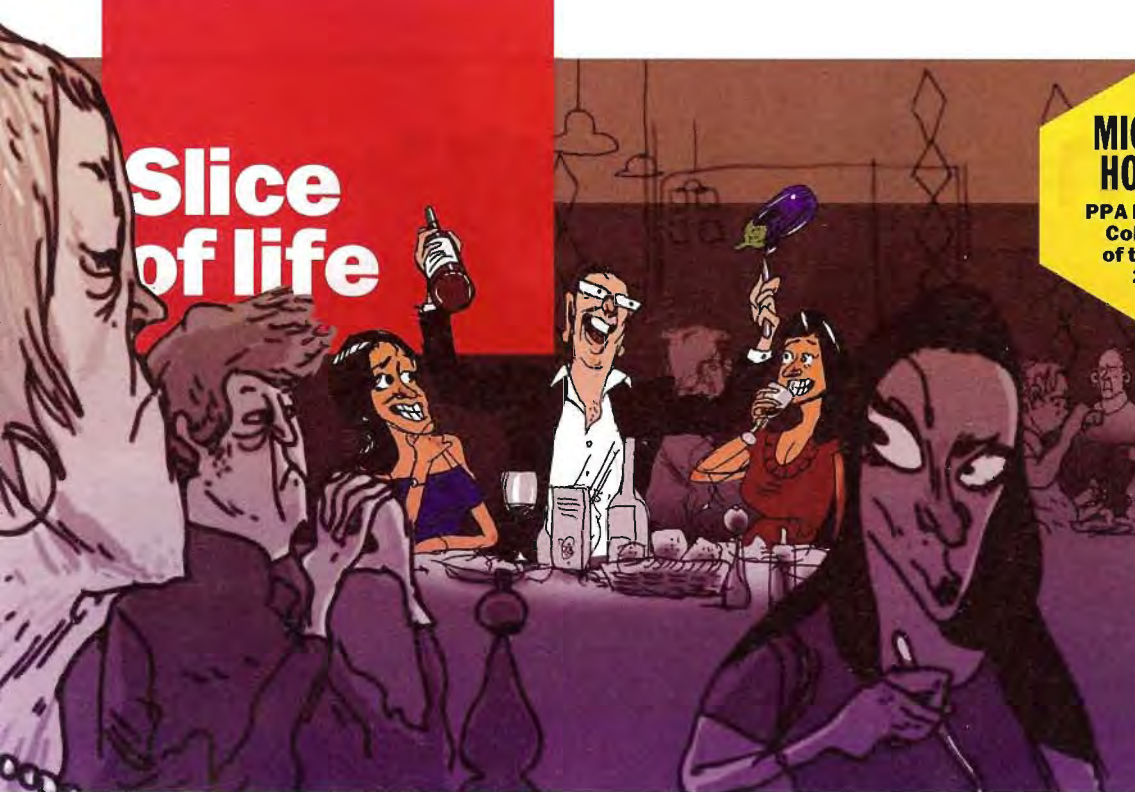


# Slice of life



**MICHAEL HODGES**

**PPA Magazine Columnist of the Year 2010**

The answer is: this kind of man. Me. It is I who is sinking to new levels, and frankly who could blame me? The two Turkish women are attractive in every sense. Elegant, charming, extremely intelligent – they are completely happy in my

company and completely happy to see me charge through several helpings of the above dishes – sucuk and hellim (grilled beef sausage) with baba ganoush (obviously an aubergine dip), sigara boregi (fried pastry filled with cheese), tvuk ciger (chicken livers) – and at least a litre of what is one of their fine country's drier reds before we get to the main course.

This is hunkar begendi: diced lamb on a bed of creamy aubergine, and the attractive Turkish women insist I have it. I'm very glad, as it achieves a kind of sublime lamb and aubergine genius. It strikes me, as the manager wanders over with more yakut, that London is being overtaken by Turkish food. This restaurant, Ishtar, was recommended by one of Time Out's food critics – I can't reveal his name or he would have to eat me – and they also insist I go to Mangal in Dalston for the sensational grills. South of the river, the Tas chain is apparently taking over Southwark and there is a popular belly-dancing night in the café opposite Penge Police Station.

Even cooking the stuff at home is comparatively easy, though the trick is to do all the tricky stuff with onions and flat leaf parsley – the prep, as it is known in the trade – before you get more than halfway down the bottle of wine you have opened to get you in the mood.

This is not a problem if someone else is cooking, and, returning my attention to the hunkar begendi and the company, I sigh with a profound inner happiness. Yes, the more cynical onlookers were right. These attractive and charming Turkish women are PRs and the odious man is a journalist. But what lovely PRs, what gluggable wine and yes, I'll say it again: wow, what a wonderful aubergine dish.

[michaelhodges@timeout.com](mailto:michaelhodges@timeout.com)

## Turkey berky

**'N**o, please,' the man insists. 'Have have some more of this lovely hellim and sucuk. The cheese is great. You've had enough? Okay, try the baba ganoush. Wow...' Everyone stops and looks at the man as he halts in mid exclamation. 'What...' he then barks, 'a wonderful aubergine dish. Marvellous.' A small wave of intense dislike ripples from where he sits through the other customers in the restaurant, but still he goes on. 'And I must say I am tempted to have more of the sigara boregi. Fancy some? Go on, help yourself. And let's have another glass of the yakut. You know, I really feel Turkish wine is going places. Tell you what, let's have another bottle, shall we?'

When a man finds himself sinking to the level of saying: 'Wow, what a wonderful aubergine dish,' in an attempt to impress the two Turkish women he is having lunch with, then

he is no longer able to call himself a man in the fullest sense. He has dipped down somewhere below manhood to a bad place. If not actively despicable, he is certainly a tosspot. And this man, in full, self-regarding flow, quaffing great gulps of Turkish wine, covering himself with bits of pastry and flatbread, gesturing for more drink and laughing at his own jokes, is one of the tossier pots in any of London's restaurants this lunchtime.

There are few things more offensive to the unwilling observer than a clearly odious man trying to impress women. And we should perhaps offer our sympathy to the other, less

odious men, who are unlucky enough to look on as he works his way through the mezze before him. The more cynical onlookers among them have guessed what is happening,

but the innocent customers must be wondering how nice people like the two Turkish women have ended up with such a man.

Innocent customers like the couple at the next table perhaps. The male of the pair is obviously asking himself – as he shakes his head sadly, and his girlfriend grimaces and scowls and her mouth does that tightening

thing that suggests she might vomit every time he says something – what kind of man is that?



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