



echoes

OF THE PAST

ARTICLE BY
Christine Casha

As I sat chatting with my friends in this recently-opened café, Emma's Kitchen, I could not help but notice its unique and stylish interior design, different to anything I had ever seen in Malta. The huge characteristic windows, the grey walls contrasting with the colourful traditional Maltese tiles, their super cute teapots and salt and pepper containers, the plants, as well as all the other minimalistic décor; it all made me feel as if I was transported in one of those cafés you come across on *Pinterest* or *Tumblr*.

However, back then, little did I know that this minimalistic café actually has an intriguing history lurking behind it. I later found out

that, back in the day, this was an iconic English pub, called The Half-Way Inn; a pub for older English men and locals alike, who would often visit for a drink or a quick snack as well as to play pool or darts.

For this reason, I met up with Emma Warrington herself, the mastermind behind this innovative café, to gain more insight on her impressive journey in transforming an old abandoned pub into a completely different modern and fancy environment.

The Half-Way Inn had been closed down for 12 long years, before Emma decided to give it another shot and opened its doors to the public again last October. “It was just falling apart”, Emma explained as she recalled her first few days in the place, during which time, it was simply used for storage. It was very dark and Emma explained, that she could barely walk around with all the stuff that was there.

However, Emma immediately recognised the potential this location had and did not let its former, messy state stop her in her initiative. One can only imagine the huge amount of work that needed to be done to achieve that kind of re-decoration, though Emma explained, that she managed to complete the renovation process in only five and a half months!

This rather short process was made possible thanks to Emma’s background in architecture. In fact, she was actually an architect before she embarked on this exciting new journey. Although she enjoyed architecture, she also started to enjoy cooking, during her fourth year of studies. Cooking, for her, was at first simply a hobby. She used to cook stuff all the time and post it online, as “there was always such a good reception for it.” Eventually, she started realising that this was what she really wanted to do.

At first glance, one might regard Emma’s Kitchen as completely fresh and way different from how it was before. However, some remnants of the former pub remain present till this day. Emma gave some of the old décor a new twist and managed to incorporate it elegantly into the stylish contemporary environment one finds today. Most noticeable are perhaps the traditional Maltese tiles in the main room of the café, which give that characteristic feel to the place. Emma explained that she kept these, along with the classic beams on the high ceiling as well as the old dartboard, which is now placed over the bar and serves as the menu. Thus, the past still echoes the present at Emma’s Kitchen.

Apart from the design, another traditional element which captured my attention as I spoke to Emma (and as lunch-time was approaching and my stomach started growling with hunger) was the item on the menu entitled ‘Bajd u Bejken’. What is remarkable about this is that it is the only item on the menu written in Maltese. It is the traditional Maltese *fira* with crispy bacon and eggs, with two added ingredients: avocado and the Middle-Eastern chilli paste Harissa. “I wanted to do a twist on something local”, explained Emma. ‘Bajd u Bejken’ is also quite similar to what the old pub used to serve; it is another way of ensuring past traditions remain alive in the present.

The rest of the menu is a contrast, because it is both very contemporary and international. Take, for instance, the ‘Beef Pho Broth’, a Vietnamese speciality they recently launched, which Emma explained people were very excited about as no one in Malta had ever served it before. In fact, most of the items on the menu could not be found anywhere else on the island. No wonder they are some of Malta’s most Instagrammable dishes!



emma's kitchen

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