

AND IT STONED ME

Dylan McGrath's culinary venture with a twist is an absolute delight, says **Lucinda O'Sullivan**, who savoured each and every delicious mouthful

Chefs who sniggered at the thought of Dylan McGrath cooking on hot stones might be smiling on the other side of their faces, as Dylan, who dazzled the dining public with his apparent arrogance, is off and running again with his impressive new restaurant. In the past, his TV appearances haven't done him any favours. I hear, however, that he's very nice to work with and he's very supportive of his team, borne out by the fact that some have rejoined him in his new venture. A number of top venues were mooted for his talents but, having already achieved a Michelin star, he's joined the quasi-Temple Bar scene of the George's/Exchequer/Aungier Street dining area *du jour*. Nearby is the other erstwhile boy wonder, Conrad Gallagher, with Salon des Saveurs: will the strip be big enough for their talents and egos?

McGrath's *cuisine minceur* menu is a really clever one; interesting and modern, it offers lots of options to graze lightly and healthily, share, or indulge. Symbols abound, and they indicate wheat-, gluten- sugar- or dairy-free dishes, options low in saturates, vegetarian choices, or dishes containing a

superfood. The bites, starters, pastas, and salads sections of the menu offer full or half portions of tantalising treats (€3.25-€15.95); each one has an accompanying blurb, talked through in the first person by McGrath. He bakes his tandoori chicken wings — no oil, just yoghurt — with bean sprouts cooked in orange juice.

Asian quails are grilled on a stick with radish, mango and coriander, to keep them low fat and to cut the spice with sweetness. Pasta is cooked in a vegetable stock with no cream. Black linguine comes with crunchy fennel, raw scallops, squid, dill and Parmesan, while tagliatelle has a truffle dressing with low-fat yogurt.

Delicious salt cod *brandade* (€3.50) proved to be three prosciutto-wrapped, erect 'corks' on cocktail sticks with a low-fat creme fraiche. Three sweet baby chillies (€3.25), their bellies slit, were stuffed with avocado and tuna tartare, their disarming

simplicity belying a fiery bite that had Rena gasping, and me scoffing the lot! Duck 'n' beef sandwiches (€4.75), had not a grain of wheat in sight. Instead, there were three sophisticated 'leaves' of salt-cured beef and citrus-scented duck, pressed together with herb goat's cheese, served with "my own mango chutney". Creamy crab mayonnaise (€8.95) on two slices of rustic toast was sprinkled with torn basil and wheatgrass. All superb.

The much-hyped hot stone is but a small element of the experience. The kitchen place your cut of meat or fish on the stone, they turn it over, and it arrives at your table. You then decide how long you wish to cook your food

for; the stone holds its cooking temperature for 25 minutes. You can have steaks (€21-€31) – rump, rib-eye, fillet, sirloin, T-bone – or halibut or tuna. Posh hamburgers (€16.90), or dinky “Glamburgers” (€16.90/€8.50) are “off the stone”. Boy, they looked good. A cracking tender and tasty 9oz rib-eye with a prawn glaze (€27) arrived sizzling, and cooking good-o. Also off the stone, fish in a bag (€21) was fabulous and fragrant. Meaty, juicy mackerel fillets were baked with shallots, saffron, fennel, quinoa, coriander and dill: so aromatic.

As for sides – a mighty interesting dozen – we could have made a meal of them alone. We pigged out on chunky truffle chips sitting upright in truffle mayo with Parmesan (€4.25), mashed sweet potato with agave syrup and rosemary (€4.25), and chunky polenta chips (€4.25) with pink peppercorns and rosemary.

Desserts (€6.95/€8.95) are sugar- and fat-free and we shared a marshmallow, melon and lemongrass soup (€6.95). With two glasses each of Bianco di Toscana Aprilante 2009 (€7.50) and Maiana Salice Salentino 2008 (€7), our bill with optional service was €129.50. This rustic stone is a gem. **L**

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