



back to the Stone Age

Corinna Hardgrave heads to Dublin's George's Street to try out one of the most talked about restaurants of this year.

Rustic Stone...oh dear, I thought. I never expected hot stones for cooking meat to feature in the 'What Dylan did next' saga. As for adding a healthy slant, well, who would have thought that gastro genius Dylan McGrath, the tempestuous creator of the former high profile Michelin starred restaurant Mint, would be the saviour of the nutritionally damned? Yes, all of those people with allergies, don't likes and what-nots, can now eat in peace and have all their culinary foibles catered for on a stone. A Rustic Stone. Sorry Dylan, I try hard, but when I go out at night...how can I put it? Well, I just want to enjoy myself and forget the calories.

So yes, you've guessed it, I hated the concept before I even got there, but being a consummate professional, I earnestly put all my energy into cranking my mind open so that I could give it a fair chance. We were shown to the worst table in the house, downstairs, squeezed beside the stairs and toilets. "Ha ha," laughed FOOD&WINE editor Ross Golden-Bannon as he glided from the bar up to his superior perch by the window upstairs. On the plus side, we had

a bird's eye view of where Dylan was hard at work.

We sipped our cocktails as we studied the menu which is divided into bites, starters, main courses (on and off the proverbial stone), pasta, salads, sides and desserts. So, a lot of reading. We started with four bites and a starter. The big green olives and grapefruit (€3.50), served on crushed ice made from cucumber juice, were nicely refreshing, and the chilli peppers (€3.25) were sweet and skinless as promised and stuffed with a tasty filling of tuna and avocado. The duck 'n beef sandwiches (€4.75) were delicious bites of salt cured beef and citrus scented duck, sandwiched with herb goats' cheese. So far, so posh-nosh-tapas.

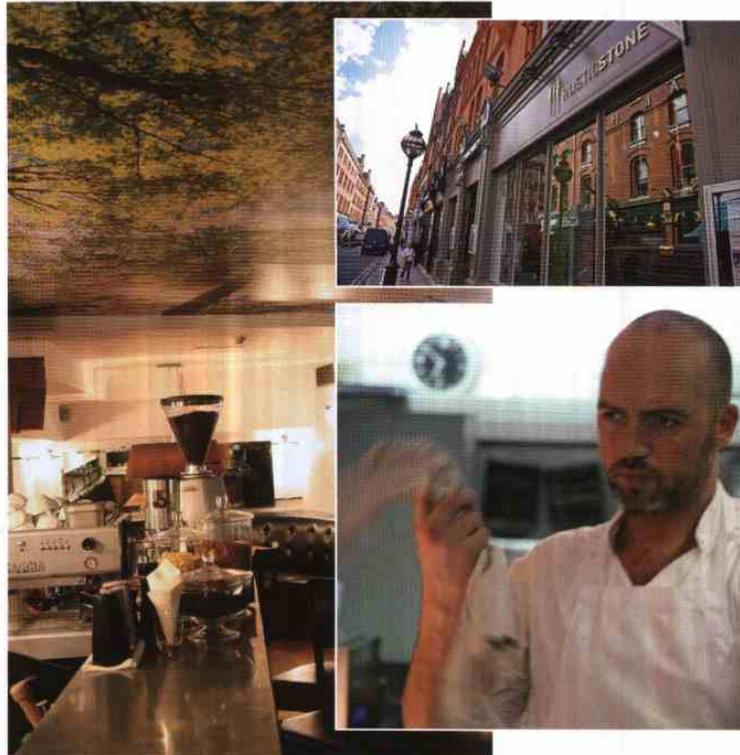
Lurking on the menu is the crowd pleaser favourite of chicken wings (€5), so I had to give them a go. They came in a beautiful white bowl and...deep breath...tasted divine. Their sticky soy sauce worked beautifully with the crunch of crushed roasted sesame seeds and red sprouts, and was given an added flavour dimension with lime zest, garlic chips and coriander. The iced cucumber soup (€5.75) arrived in a small carafe, to be poured over a



quenelle of frozen avocado (not as sweet as the avocado of his Mint days) and tomato concassé with coriander, chervil and dill at the table. The Michelin DNA shone though in the clarity of taste in this dish, although I can't help feeling that it would have looked more attractive in a white bowl rather than the square glass dish over ice.

On to the main course, and the much publicised stuff-on-a-stone. We opted for the rump of beef with basil and pine nuts (€21) and the rib-eye of beef with prawn glaze (€27). Both arrived cooked rare on wooden boards with a black, zen looking slab of lava that had been heated to 300° degrees. It was unexpectedly impressive, and the rump, which you cook in slices to your own

restaurantreview



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taste, was fantastic. Our other two main courses were the 'glamburgers' (€16.90) which come as two politely sized, medium cooked burgers, which tasted great; and the fish in a bag (€21), which comprised baked fillets of mackerel with carrots, shallots, saffron, fennel, quinoa, coriander and dill, delivered a mild 'tahdah' moment as the bag was opened and the aromas wafted out.

By this time, with some nice Côtes du Rhône to moisten our palates, we were in great form, thoroughly enjoying the evening and flicking beads of water onto the stones to watch them sizzle. It was time for dessert and I was excited as Dylan's desserts in Mint were legendary. The lime tapioca (€8.20) arrived in a glass bowl topped with a delicate coconut mousse and lychees, an ethereal taste

of Asia and a true taste of Dylan. The chocolate soup with chocolate mousse and roasted, grated hazelnuts (€9.50) was Ambassador-you-are-really-spoiling-us good, and the beautifully presented exotic fruit sushi (€7.50) was a clever combination of mango and exotic fruits rolled in sticky dessert rice and served with a caramel sauce which was skilfully spiked with passion fruit.

Not a single bum dish the whole night, which took all our 'open minds' by surprise. The service was perfectly pitched and despite the complicated menu Dylan McGrath continues to have the palate of an angel. Well worth a number of visits. I for one, will be back. ■

Rustic Stone, 17 South George's Street, Dublin 2. Tel: 01 7079596

Hot Tip: It's Game On at the Four Seasons in Dublin where a special game menu runs from 16 to 28 November with delicious dishes like slow roasted rabbit loin, quail, pigeon, grouse and venison terrine, and wok fried Asian pigeon. A perfect treat for colder evenings.