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Restaurant Review - Mint

Mint condition - There's a bargain to be had at Dylan McGrath's Michelin-starred restaurant, writes Katy McGuinness

Last week, for the price of a mediocre meal in any one of a number of very ordinary Dublin restaurants, we ate sublime, beautiful, exceptional food created by Dylan McGrath - he of the Michelin star - at his Mint restaurant in Ranelagh, Dublin.



Mint in Ranelagh, Dublin 6

Restricted by the size of the room in which he operates (the tight space and the lack of a bar or reception area are really the only things about Mint that disappoint), McGrath has come up with a new early bird tapas menu designed to entice punters across the threshold in the early evening so that he can turn over the tables and, hopefully, keep his head above water in tough times. Bills in Mint have the capacity to go stratospheric at dinner and the experience is, regrettably, beyond many pockets. But between 5.30 and 7pm each evening, ordinary, non-expense-account mortals can see for themselves what all the fuss is about.

For €55, you get to choose between two alternate five-course tapas menus, each accompanied by two glasses of wine selected by Pierre Paillot, Mint's award-winning sommelier. The wine is included in the price of €55, and I see from my receipt that €10 is deducted if the customer is a non-drinker.

We started with a glass of champagne for me (€18), a diet coke (€4) for my companion and a selection of the wonderful breads that are made each day in the kitchen. (Don't, whatever you do, miss the bacon and onion.) We each chose a different tapas selection, thereby covering everything on the menu, bar one pudding. The canapé and appetiser courses are served together. Option one comprises red pepper jelly with avocado mousse and cod brandade, accompanied by a glass of the popular Dona Rosa Rias Baixas albarino 2007 - a visual delight and good on the palate too. Pumpkin soup with parmesan cassonade was pleasant if not earth-shattering. (I just looked up cassonade and the online dictionary says it means raw sugar, not refined. Hmm. I am none the wiser.) In option two the canapé was foie gras mousse served with potato purée, sprinkled with mushroom powder - delicious and intense - and the appetizer was langoustine cassonade (there it is again) served with apple purée and celeriac foam - a soup. The langoustine flavour was too subtle for me.

On to course three, where both the scallops and langoustine were superb. The scallops were served with celeriac and truffle purée, duck consommé, smoked bacon and a tartare of scallop and air-dried duck. It's a dish that has been honed on the dinner menu and is quite simply one of the best things that I've tasted in a very long time. Langoustine ravioli served with truffle, leeks and roasted chicken wings was another transporting dish.

Course four - the meat - offered lamb filet served with courgette, pickled bell pepper, parmesan and smoked paprika (option one) or pig's head, braised, and served with pumpkin gnocchi, turnip slices and turnip purée (option two). The lamb was good, the smoked paprika foam a well-conceived counterpoint to the meat and we loved the courgettes in tempura batter, but the pig's head was extraordinary: rich braised chunks of cheek and delicate beignets of crispy ear, partnered by a robust Cahors, Le Prestige, Chateau La Reyne 2004.

We enjoyed the raspberries served with almond milk, raspberry jelly and almond biscuit but passed on the coconut brûlée with roasted pineapple, pineapple sorbet and anise in favour of cheese, including a perfect epouses, which should have incurred a supplement of €15 that did not make it onto the final bill.

Service was noticeably smilier and less up itself than it has been in the past. Mint seems to have relaxed a little, and is none the worse for that. Our meal cost €142.88 including 12.5% service.

That is a bargain.

Mint

47 Ranelagh Village, Dublin 6

Tel: 01 497 8655

Rating: 4/5

December 7, 2008

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