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McGrath's modern manifesto

Rustic Stone

17 South Great George's Street
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www.rusticstone.ie

Chef: Dylan McGrath

The reaction of foodies to **Dylan McGrath's** new venture reminds me of the reaction of art critic John Ruskin upon seeing *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* by James McNeill Whistler in 1878. Ruskin accused him of throwing a pot of paint in the public's face.

People seem similarly outraged with the former Michelin-starred darling of Mint Restaurant, so I needed to settle my nerves when I arrived at his new venture by ordering a G&T. It looked like I was going to be challenged and indeed, this was no ordinary G&T. They serve saffron gin from Dijon with tonic (€7), normally garnished with cucumber, but served with lime here. Quite the delight.

I was with a running friend who had completed an ironman triathlon in Britain and a 100-mile run in Connemara. He's the perfect person to peruse a menu filled with nutritional information: symbols guide you through dishes low in saturated fat, wheat-free, gluten-free, dairy-free and even 'super foods'.

Thankfully, there's also a wine recommendation with nearly every dish. The relatively simple and almost Japanese-like wooden décor gives a clear message that this is all

about the food – the bill of fare is more manifesto than menu.

To start, I had the iced cucumber soup with frozen avocado (€5.75). The skin was used to make the soup, with 'good fat' from the avocado sorbet. Although fresh and clean-tasting, I was wrong-footed a little by the clatter of bowls and containers used to serve it. Perhaps staff could lead the way here?

The crab mayonnaise on toast with torn herbs and wheatgrass (€8.95), sounded scarier than it was; the 'low fat mayonnaise' was richly woven with the sweet crab, and the scraping of wheatgrass gave the gentle punch needed for this 'healthier' version.

I went off-piste from the excellent wine service for purely sentimental reasons and ordered wine

from my old alma mater of Angers, or, to be more precise, Anjou Domaine des Forges 2009, Touraine. It was perhaps too young to deliver on the promised gamey cabernet style 'with power and depth'.

For the main course, I had the rib eye of beef (9oz) with 'prawn glaze' €27, (wheat-free and gluten-free), which arrived sizzling on the infamous hot stones. Staff ex-

Watching the pennies

Starter: sweet chilli peppers stuffed with tartare of tuna, avocado and fresh herbs €3.25

Main course: 'little illies' pasta of peas, broadbeans, courgette ribbons, mint and chervil with low-fat yoghurt €7.50

Dessert: exotic fruit 'sushi' with sticky rice wasabi and caramel passion fruit sauce €7.50

Wine: Domaine des Forges, Vin de Pays, Chardonnay, Saumur, Loire Valley, 2009 €21

Dinner for two: €57.50

Breaking the bank

Starter: borlotti bean minestrone with chorizo €10.95

Main course: Maurice Ketylle T-bone steak hung for 28 days, for two €62

Dessert: chocolate soup with chocolate mousse €9.50

Wine: Pieve de' Pitti, Cerretello Chianti Superiore, Tuscany 2006 €40

Dinner for two: €142.90

Tomás Clancy rates the wine list

It's possible to create a captivating, ambitious wine list from just a handful of well-chosen wines. With Rustic Stone, my hopes were high for a lean, jewel-like list. Instead, what greeted me was a list lacking in imagination.

There are 23 wines on the list, two sparkling, nine whites, nine reds and three dessert wines. Shockingly for a restaurant with six different types of big beef steaks, the matching reds are hugely underwhelming. I wanted access to a top shiraz at €35 or a big-boned syrah or Châteauneuf at €40.

Here there's a Domaine Pierre Henri Morel, Côtes Du Rhône Villages 2008 at €28, a too-young Château Lacapelle Cabanac, Cahors 2009 at €21, and a middle-weight Pieve de' Pitti, Cerretello, Chianti Superiore 2006 at €40.

The white wine pick could be the generous, full-bodied Mahi Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough 2008 at €9 for a glass, €24 for a half bottle and €38.90 for the bottle. On the red side, I would go for the Casa Tamaya, Carmenere, Limari Valley, Chile 2009 at €6.75 for a glass, €19 for a half bottle and €31 for a bottle. However, it's widely available in other restaurants at €24-€27.

Rating: **

plained that it arrived rare and I could remove it immediately to a plate or even cook it a bit more later, as the stone stayed hot for another 30 minutes.

My initial scepticism soon dissolved with the superb first bite. The cleverly, barely cooked prawns, which I finished off myself, were a delight. A small dish of creamy prawns and seafood added a further modern take on 'surf n'turf'. My running mate had a Rolls-Royce of a 10oz sirloin steak by Donald Russell (€31). Certainly, it's not cheap, but it made for a magic combination with our polenta chips (€4.25) with pink peppercorns and rosemary.

We also shared an orange and rocket salad with shaved fennel

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(€6.25), baby spinach, pickled carrot, paper-thin cucumber with caramel pecans and the clever addition of coriander seeds and fresh coriander leaves. If James McNeill Whistler made salads, this would be it.

For dessert I had the lime tapioca with coconut mousse (€8.20) – that's tapioca cooked in lime juice with a coconut mousse, with chopped 'Vit c packed' lychees. The Asian flavours and textures were possibly missing a textural contrast. Although the look and flavour are very chic-New York street-food, it did seem that so much astonishing energy went into the other courses that McGrath ran out of steam with the desserts.

Not everyone will like this and the menu is unwieldy, but McGrath is expressing a zeitgeist. During the Celtic tiger, it was all Guilbaud's, Chapter One and L'Écrivain at the weekend and heated-up Domino's pizza in vast marble kitchens during the week. Things have changed.

People are now actually learning about food, and this is part of it. I suspect if no mention were made of the health benefits of these dishes, we would all be raving about the clever couture-chef turned high-street style icon.



Rustic Stone: a restaurant for our times