



*Tom*  
**Doorley** EATS AND DRINKS

# With his new venue, Dylan proves that the times they are a-changin’

■ **FADE STREET SOCIAL**

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**Y**OU may wonder why Dylan McGrath's new restaurant is called Fade Street Social. The more cynical amongst you may assume that the idea is nicked from Jason Atherton, the former Gordon Ramsay protégé, whose Pollen Street Social is one of London's hottest tickets at the moment.

In fact, it does owe something to Pollen Street in that both establishments are expressly designed for socialising. Part of Fade Street offers small plates, as the buzzword has it, another part will soon be offering stews and casseroles in a more restaurant-like context, yet another is a very cool bar (the licence for which was the subject of a legal challenge from the neighbours).

And there's even a vast space on the roof, the winter garden, where the socialisers can suck on Marlboro Lights or puff their Cohibas. Pollen Street talks about 'deformalised dining', which may well be a phrase dreamed up by their PR agency, but I quite like the idea. It sounds more deliberate than 'informal'. Fade Street, too, has that spirit in spades.

'Is it all hype?' has been the question on the digital lips of the Twitterati concerning this much-anticipated opening. The short answer is no. Fade Street Social, so far, is very good indeed. It's also different and confident and seriously raises the bar in Dublin. Sitting in the main part of the restaurant — the 'tapas' bit for want of a better word — I found it hard to believe that I was still in Ireland. The feel is distinctly London. As is the scale. This is Ireland's biggest restaurant complex.

What did we eat? Lots and lots of little things and, before you ask, no, there was not a single bum note. At what you might call the amuse bouche end of the spectrum we were seduced by cured salmon with truffle honey, yoghurt and lemon purée: a melting confection of perfect flavours and textures. And there was the tangy, salty air-dried lamb with a fig compote and celery leaves (a much underused ingredient as a rule) which was a serious palate teaser.

And then came a very clever little dish: a couple of crisp cushions of very thin, fine deep-fried pastry stuffed with truffled cream cheese and then wrapped in prosciutto which, of course, melted. One could eat a lot of these.

A mini-hotdog of lobster meat mixed with a béarnaise sauce with oodles of tarragon was held within a soft, sweet brioche-like bun. Skate wing came in a little casserole, steamed until just done and still pink at the bone, topped with a sweet confit of onions

and a translucent sheet of melted lardo (the delicious cured Italian pork fat).

Bacon and cabbage burgers (what a great

title) comprised a rich, slippery, intensely-flavoured combination of pork belly, smoked black pudding, sweet onions, peppery bacon and crisp cabbage in a soft bap.

Cod cheeks encased in crisp breadcrumbs were impeccably cooked, spankingly fresh and their sweetness was nicely pointed up by a little spiced carrot purée.

At this stage, freighted also with plenty of excellent bread, we ground to a halt, refusing even to contemplate such temptations as the intriguing 'chocolate and rose yoghurt ice cream in a waffle cone' and the lusciously-entitled 'Coconut rice pudding, lemongrass, melon sorbet and ginger mousse'. Can you imagine having to leave such things for another day.

Dylan McGrath's heart is in haute cuisine, the kind of wildly-complex yet disciplined dishes he was cooking at Mint — but he has the remarkable ability to think outside

those confines, creatively and commercially. You need cleverness, skill and discipline to cook like that and you also need it, in a different way, to create a vast restaurant which delivers such food as Fade Street does, and do it properly time and time again.

**T**HERE are not many who are up to that challenge.

Prices in this busy, noisy but amazingly-efficient restaurant run between €4 and €12 per dish. Two people can eat well for €60 but most of us will be tempted to push higher. It seems Fade Street Social is in the business of delivering value for money.

To do so, it needs to keep busy and that is what worries its competitors. Their fears are probably justified. Dublin has just become an even better place to eat.





Simply delicious: Tuna and tomato ravioli shallot and tomato fondue

## WINE CHOICE

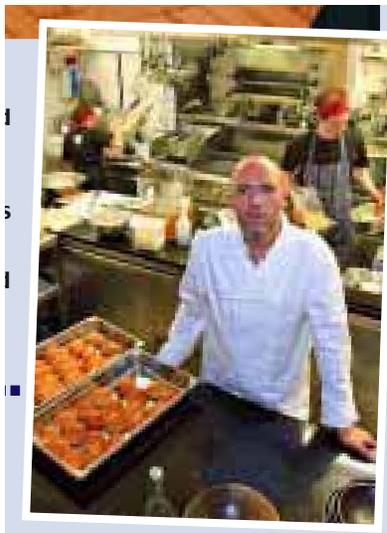
ALL wines are available by the shot, glass, carafe and bottle. Hooray! And there's Prosecco for €36 and a good Champagne for €66 (is this the cheapest in town?) The lively Portuguese *Quinta da Alorna* — both white and red — at €1.85/€5.50/€12.50/€20 offers great value. We had the lovely pink, dry *Tenuta Nicante* for the same price. *Avelina Vegas* — *Montespino Rueda* €2/€6/€16.50/€28 is pure zing and zest and *Finca Nueva Rioja Reserva* is sound at €2.70/€8.10/€22.50/€36.

## AND ANOTHER THING...

They do a hot whiskey for €4.50.

## SMART MONEY

THERE'S nothing unsmart about the food prices here but €4 seems a bit steep for a flat white.





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