



# Tapas proves Dylan is truly a master chef

Everybody wants a little piece of chef **Dylan McGrath**. He's the moody enfant terrible, who won a Michelin star for his restaurant, Mint, now closed. He's the no-nonsense one on *MasterChef*. He's the dynamic force behind the popular **Rustic Stone** restaurant and now, around the corner, he has just opened **Fade Street Social**, which completes the gentrification of this Dublin street.

Myself and the boy decide to rock up to **Fade Street Social** on the bank holiday Sunday evening, without a reservation.

It's early, around six o'clock, so we decide to chance our arm and see if we can get a table. The weather has just changed from mild to freezing cold, and atmospherically autumnal, with rain and leaves blowing in the wind and sticking to the footpath. My face is cold and when I step inside **Fade Street Social** I am welcomed by a warm blast of air.

I'm reminded of all the things I love about the changing of the seasons. Coming inside from the cold, ordering hot food, shedding coats and hats and gloves and scarves and settling into the embrace of a good meal and a nice glass of wine. The woman on reception is equally welcoming, and politely tells us we are welcome to eat without reservation but she will need the table back in an hour-and-a-half or so. That's fine by us. I have to be home for *Downton Abbey* anyway, don't you know.

We make our way to our seats. **Fade Street Social** is made up of two restaurants — the gastro bar, which serves tapas and beer and wine, and then a fancier restaurant, which is more traditional. We go casual and opt for the tapas.

The website says **Fade Street Social** is a departure from the formality of fine dining, but it is still far fancier than I was expecting.

Fade Street itself has come to represent the coolest element of young, outgoing Dublin, with the No Name Bar and Hogans, The Market Bar and L'Gueuleton all luring the coolest

kids through their doors. But **Fade Street Social** is all beige leather and warm lighting. It's like walking into an expensive Chloé handbag, with all those taupe shades and blond wood.

The seats in the centre of the gastro pub are like miniature gymnast's horses and I wonder if it might be a bit of a job to balance oneself on them, but we are seated on more traditional chairs at the bar, which is the centrepiece of the room.

Behind the bar is not a mixologist, but the charcoal grill and a team of chefs who are busily preparing your food. And there, at the head of the bar, in his chef whites, is McGrath himself, looking out from under his heavy eyelids, his mouth moving noiselessly into a little microphone which is connected to a walkie-talkie which

allows him to send instructions to the cooks behind the bar, who all have earpieces and microphones too, without anyone being able to hear what he is saying. Instead, we're just left to wonder if he's quietly dressing down the chefs in their earpieces or simply saying, 'we need more cress'.

There are cute menus on the bar, with an original design on them of animals dressed in chefs' outfits, and there is a surprisingly large selection of 'proper' beer as the boy might say.

Forget your mass-produced rubbish. This is a beer connoisseur's paradise. We order the bottle of Estrella for two, which comes in a champagne-shaped bottle and its own cooler.

A silent waiter appears behind my back. I dub him 'vampire waiter' for the night because he seems to be able to materialise beside me without a sound, and usually at the point where I'm saying something like: "If that creepy vampire waiter shows up, warn me."

We order potatoes cooked in beef dripping topped with hollandaise (€3.50), octopus rolled in herbs served with thin slice of Spanish ham brushed in pork fat scented with rosemary (€9), which is extraordinary. The floured crispy chiffon squid with light lobster mayonnaise and



tarragon (€5.50) is disappeared in a flash, and the Patanegra Iberico pork poached with fennel powder (€12) is a special and it's obvious why. The boy gobbles most of this. The charcoal-roasted great Irish sirloin (€20) is very rare and very tender. Steak-lovers prepare to be delighted. Meanwhile, the Edward Cullen waiter attentively refills our glasses.

**N**either of us want dessert until we look at the menu, at which point we simply must order one each because they look so enticing.

We go for the coconut rice pudding, lemon-grass melon sorbet and ginger mousse (€7.50) whose flavours are just brilliant together and the basil sugar doughnuts with lychee and mango dipping sauce (€6.50). I order this latter more out of curiosity but the basil and mango work so extraordinarily well together that I have to restrain myself from scoffing every single one.

It is quite exceptional to eat this kind of food at these kind of prices and if McGrath can maintain it he is on to a winner. It's hard to find fault with anything here. I know it's probably

not polite to mention it, but as a hater of all sudden and loud noises I was almost elated to find the toilet seats in the ladies' are impossible to slam. Impossible! After my initial surprise at the pneumatic system controlling the lid, I lifted it again and tried to slam it with all my might. It stopped millimetres from the bowl before hissing quietly into place.

I can picture this as a very popular spot, especially coming up to Christmas. The only thing that surprised me was how grown-up it is in comparison with its trendy neighbours. It appears to be aimed at a different clientele to The Market bar and doesn't have the Parisienne charm of its neighbour L'Gueulton, which suggests to me that this is an excellent addition to this coolest of Dublin streets.

**RECOMMENDED:** Octopus carpaccio  
**THE DAMAGE:** €89.45 for four dishes and a side, two desserts, two americanos, a large bottle of Estrella and a large bottle of still water.  
**AT THE TABLE:** Sulky glamour pusses and their long-suffering boyfriends  
**ON THE STEREO:** Too quiet to hear so it just sounds like inoffensive muzak.

