



HIGH SOCIETY

It's undoubtedly one of the most anticipated restaurant launches of the year. Visiting the first of its food offerings to open, a casual gastro bar, Corinna Hardgrave finds Dylan McGrath's **Fade Street Social** to be well worth the wait.

At long last, the one we've been waiting for. A new restaurant from Dylan McGrath, the self-described perfectionist who was once better known for seasoning his Michelin starred food with expletives before working his way into our hearts as a judge on *Masterchef Ireland*.

Situated on the newly spruced up Fade Street between Dublin's Georges Street and Drury Street, the setting is an 8,000 square foot listed building and just a few days after opening, it's buzzing.

With exposed ducts, walls stripped back to the red-brick, and reclaimed wooden floors to offset the sparkly newness, it feels very New York loft. There is a warm hue from the honey fudge-coloured upholstery and smart wooden tables and at the far end of the room a bar shimmers in the distance. Upstairs is a large bar and a winter garden.

Dylan was standing at the pass, with a headpiece that allows him to talk to an army of black clad chefs, all working at full throttle. It saves him shouting at them, he joked later. There are bar stools at the counter of the open kitchen for diners keen to get a closer look at the action, high communal tables with horse vault stools run down the middle, and along the wall are smaller, more intimate tables.

The concept of the gastro bar is small plates packed with flavour, so very on trend and very big city. But navigating a sea of small plates can be confusing, and here they are broken into char-grilled, snacks, carpaccio, tapas from the garden and pastries; with prices running from €3.50 for potatoes cooked in beef dripping to €20 for

main-course-size portions of grilled steak, (also available as €12 portions). Many of the ingredients are Irish (although this isn't trumpeted on the menu) but influences range from Mediterranean to American and Asian.

We ordered a bottle of Quinta da Alorna, a lively Portuguese red, very reasonably priced at €20 and, as with all the wines, also available as a shot, a glass or a 500ml carafe. And so, the four of us set about working our way through as many dishes as possible. Our first wave of tapas arrived, many in Japanese-influenced dark, unglazed bowls and sushi-style wooden boxes.

Chicken in a glass (€8.50) was an ode to Dylan's magical touch with flavours. Succulent wing meat was bound in a savoury celeriac jelly and topped with a sour cream mousse and a gossamer light avocado puree, kissed with a touch of chervil.

Anyone who loved his food in Mint will feel twangs of nostalgia as they sink their spoon into this glass. Whole soft shell crab in sesame spiced flour (€9) was hot and crunchy, and served with a mini pot of miso mayonnaise and a crab and lemongrass dipping sauce which had a lovely touch of heat to it. Three cod cheeks (€8) were luscious and tender inside their crisp coating of fried breadcrumbs, and the dipping sauce of carrot purée had been enriched with butter and Dylan's signature hint of sweetness, another delicious throwback to Mint.

Vegetable dishes included long mandolin-cut slivers of charred leeks (€4.90) draped down the inside of a bowl with shavings of Parmesan, a boiled egg, mayonnaise and

a scattering of crunchy hazelnuts. Wild Irish mushrooms (€5.95) were served open ravioli-style with opaque strips of celeriac and a beguiling cep dressing; and, once again reminiscent of Mint, was a mousse of Jerusalem artichokes with a deep, savoury, cep infused mushroom cream on top of a chilled leek jelly (€6.50).

Other dishes included crispy deep fried squid (€5.50), and slow-cooked Chinese pork belly (€9) with a crispy peanut brittle – an inspired touch which added both flavour and texture to the dish. From the grill, we had a large portion of squab pigeon (€17), poached with thyme and finished on the hot coals; and a complete show stopper of Patanegra Iberico pork (€12) poached with fennel powder, then burnished on the grill.

Desserts were wonderful too. Baby roast pears came with spiced bread and pear mousse (€6.95), and an intensely chocolatey mousse was served with hazelnut ice cream and raspberry sauce (€6.80).

But the standout desserts were the baby banoffi (€7), an ethereal condensed milk foam spiked with thin slices of dried banana, sitting on layers of banana puree, caramel jelly, banana sorbet and crunchy biscuit crumbs; and the wonderfully clever coconut rice pudding, with a fresh lemongrass sorbet and ginger mousse (€7.50).

So, Dylan does it again. Flavour is in his DNA and at **Fade Street Social**, he delivers it on every plate.

This is set to become one of the hottest tickets in Dublin. ■