

Table Talk: **Dylan McGrath's** new city centre gastropub is already bringing in the crowds

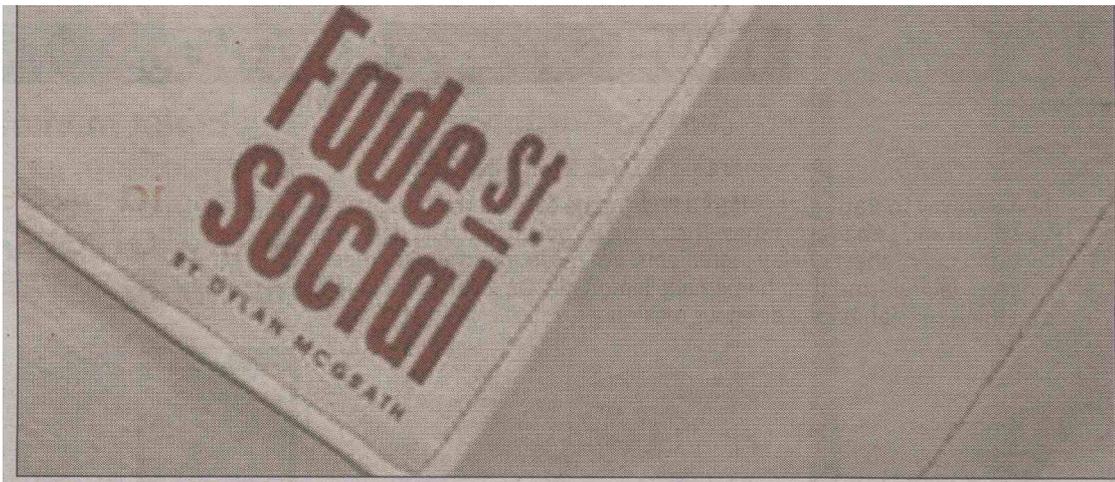
IF HE subscribes to the credo that there's no such thing as bad publicity, then **Dylan McGrath** was probably secretly pleased by the media hullabaloo that ensued when four businessmen – including Electric Picnic organiser John Reynolds – objected to his plans to obtain a full pub licence for new city centre venture, **Fade Street Social**. While rubber-necking foodies may have been hoping for some kind of skillet-at-dawn showdown, they were sorely disappointed when the judge hearing the case speedily ruled in McGrath's favour. It can't have been lost on the Masterchef star that, as well as bagging that all-important booze licence, the attendant tabloid coverage had generated much in the way of free publicity for his 8,000sq ft, €1.4million restaurant. Judging by the positively clamorous and cheering

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environment we step into on our mid-week visit, there's little chance McGrath will be employing someone to don a sandwich board and march about Dublin 2 any time soon. We are guided to our seats in the ground-floor gastrobar, replete with long communal tables and trendy artwork, which specialises in tapas-sized dishes with a European influence. Our gorgeous Antipodean waitress is as helpful as she is smiley – in marked contrast to Mister McGrath who walks past in chef's fatigues with a scowl that's less front-of-house

“Hardly up there with dodo breast soup or a unicorn-tear martini



→ charm and more Guy Ritchie menace.

The menu is vast but pretty straightforward, though I'm slightly confused by the stars dotted about to denote 'recommendations' – surely all dishes are recommended by virtue of their appearing on the menu in the first place? No matter. When our first teaser arrives all is forgiven.

Air-dried lamb carpaccio with a fig compote is not so much food per se as impossibly condensed flavour – a zingy, impeccably salted affair with just a modicum of sweetness provided by the compote and a few lesser-spotted celery leaves. It's a tantalising treat that seems to dissolve entirely on the tongue (no wonder we order as many dishes as we do).

Patanegra Iberico pork poached with fennel powder is more lean and succulent than pork has any right to be, but its arrival triggers the evening's one sticking point. There's a droplet of oil left in my bowl after the dish has been devoured and because modesty forbids me from licking it clean I request some bread from waitress number two to soak it up. She disappears to the kitchen to investigate before returning with the singularly odd response: 'We don't currently serve bread but we will... eventually.'

This seems a strange oversight for any new restaurant, but doubly so when you consider that the dish which she'd just dropped off – superb meaty Jerusalem artichokes with mushroom cream and chilled leek jelly – arrives on a slice of charred sourdough. I can understand how awkward requests must be a major bugbear for harried waiting staff, but

this is hardly up there with dodo breast soup or a unicorn-tear martini. If a restaurant can serve dishes as adventurous as 'crispy airbags served with truffle cheese' or 'air-dried ham fennel purée' then surely it can accommodate a poor country bumpkin in need of a slice of white batch.

But how can I remain perved once our half portion of squab pigeon arrives? Soaked with thyme and smoked bacon, before being roasted over coals, this is a dish entirely above reproach. The meat is rare and robust with a pleasantly salted kick; on the downside it releases some hitherto untapped canine instinct that causes me to toy with the notion of pocketing the bones to gnaw on at a later date. Whole soft shell crab in sesame spice flour with miso mayo and a crab and lemongrass sauce are a bit of a curveball from a menu dealing mostly in European fare, but it certainly wouldn't seem out of place served in a top Indian restaurant.

We finish with a divisive chocolate mousse with hazelnut ice cream and raspberry glass. My companion declares it's a breach of the trade description act because it's not suitably aerated to constitute a mousse. I argue that air bubbles are abhorrent vacuums that simply mean less dessert. Whatever you want to call it, this was a strong end to an exceptional meal. Our bill, including a decent bottle of Rioja, came to €1105, which is a significant amount of bread for a meal that didn't come with any. **Faded Street Social, Faded Street D2. Tel: (01) 604 0066. www.fadedstreetsocial.com**