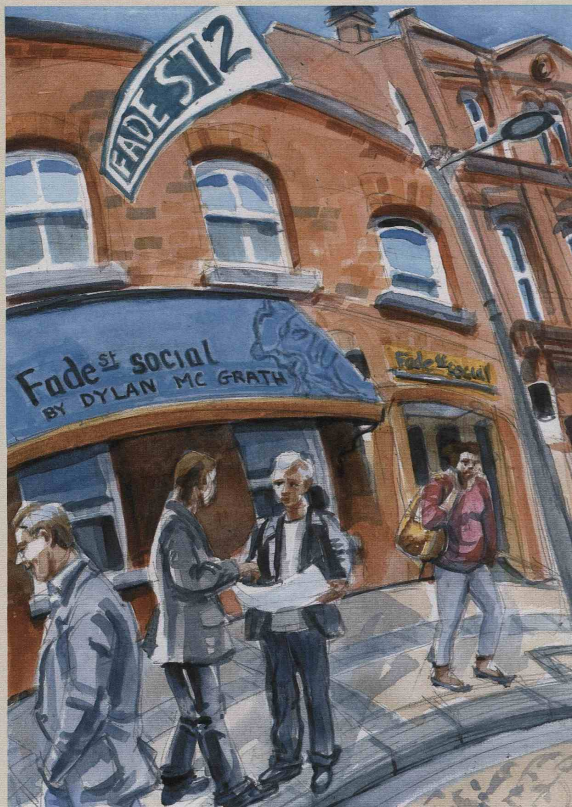




TABLETALK



EDRINA WALTON

FEAST AT FADE ST

Dylan McGrath's bold and beautiful new project has got everyone in Dublin's restaurant scene talking, says Lucinda O'Sullivan, and his dramatically presented food brings diners on a mini world tour

When the cream of Dublin's restaurant scene is out in force to check out a new arrival, you know it is major opposition. Such was the turnout to Dylan McGrath's new Fade Street Social eatery that it even included some of those who had challenged his drinks-licence application in court that week. They lost. McGrath must have had a wry smile on his face.

The food world's man of the moment, McGrath is adored by legions of females as co-presenter with Nick Munier on *MasterChef Ireland*. It's all a far cry from his initial appearance on our screens before his Michelin star at Mint in Ranelagh. He came across as surly and demanding but, as I wrote, I'd had it on good order that he was tremendously supportive of his team. Mr Surly was, in fact, a good guy!

Mint didn't work out for McGrath as we hit the recessionary times; he moved on to open Rustic Stone, where I think I can say I was probably the only critic who didn't take a sneering pot shot at the fact that he had moved into a popular genre. Rustic Stone proved a tremendous success, leading on, now, to Fade Street Social which is big, bold, beautiful and certainly not brash.

"This is what Dublin needs," said my dining companion Kate. "We could be in New York or Madrid — it's fantastic."

The overall decor throughout is urban-chic brick walls with expensive light-tan leather seating. The first floor houses a very large, clubby bar-lounge for drinks. The ground floor encompasses two eateries, a sleek tapas bar, with the chefs belting out a great range of stylish, inexpensive small dishes and, backing on to this, an awesome, contemporary, brasserie-style space. In the tapas bar, you can perch at the counter, lounge on a banquette, or be sociable at communal high tables in between.

It made my night watching a critic sitting shoulder to shoulder with a restaurateur he had recently savaged. Like two cats on a standoff, they studiously ignored each other until, my-oh-my, after 15

minutes they were suddenly 'best friends'!

The menu is broken into sections — Grill Charred; Snacks; Carpaccio; Coated & Fried; Tapas From the Garden; and Pastries. Prices run generally from €3.50 to €10, with larger portions €16-€20 on some dishes.

We road-tested it by kicking off with a mini world tour. Chinese-style whole soft shell crab (€10) was crisp and cracking in sesame spice flour, with miso mayo, and crab and lemongrass dipping sauces. Spanish-style octopus (€9) was rolled flat on a board with herbs, tweaked with morsels of thin Spanish ham brushed in pork fat scented with rosemary, and served with black olive crostini. An American-style scrumptious mini lobster hotdog (€9.95) sported succulent lobster meat, bound in bearnaise sauce in a brioche roll, while baby crab toasties with cheese (€8.50) were 'English soldier'-style fingers with a hollandaise-filled egg shell, and skinny fries drizzled with truffle mayo.

After a while, we moved on to skate wings (€10) charred with *lardo crudo* and lyonnaise; squab pigeon (€9.50); and chargrilled leeks (€4.90). We loved the skate and the leeks but the squab pigeon, roasted on coals with thyme and smoked bacon and beautifully presented in a Moroccan style, we found a tad tough going.

Did we have puds after that lot? We had to see them! Basil sugar doughnuts with lychee (€6.50) sat in a Chinese steaming basket with a mango dipping sauce on the side, while luscious chocolate mousse (€6.80) with hazelnut ice cream had a raspberry 'glass' flag in a lovely upside-down glass dish.

Wine is available by the shot, glass, carafe or bottle and we had a bottle of Sicilian crisp Borgo Selene 2011 (€25.90). With optional service our bill came to €111.05 — but boy, it was a feast! Can't wait to give it another lash. **U**

Fade Street Social,
Fade Street,
Dublin 2.
Tel: (01) 604-0066

www.lucindaosullivan.com

THREE TO TRY
BIG & BEAUTIFUL

EDEN BAR & GRILL

South William St,
Dublin 2.
Tel: (01) 670-6887

Style

Big, bright, beautiful and stylish, with great cocktails, live music, and food that is on the nose for our times. From pork-neck fillet with soft polenta, *cavolo nero* and greengage, to rib-eye with triple-cooked chips, watercress and bearnaise

Price

Mains, €16-€22; early bird 2/3 course, €20/€24

Try

Risotto nero with prawn tempura

Wine

From €22

THE CORNSTORE RESTAURANT

40A Commarket St,
Cork.
Tel: (021) 427-4777

Style

There's a great atmosphere in the sizeable old red-brick building that is the Cornstore Restaurant. Steak and seafood are the thing here, with eclectic touches by way of starters and accompaniments

Price

Mains, €16.50-€33.95; early bird 3-course, €25.95

Try

Bouillabaisse — classic shellfish and fish stew with saffron potatoes

Wine

From €19.95

THE DINING ROOM

La Stampa Hotel,
35 Dawson St,
Dublin 2.
Tel: (01) 677-4444

Style

After a series of 'celebrity chefs', the *chef de cuisine* at one of the biggest and most beautiful rooms in Dublin is Colin Kelly — formerly of One Pico. Luxury starters include scallops, lobster and foie gras

Price

Mains, €18-€32; early bird 2/3-course, €25/€28

Try

Roast loin of lamb and confit belly, with fondant potato and swedes

Wine

From €25