



STREET *Style*

A new restaurant from **Dylan McGrath** perfectly sums up the foodie mood of the moment says an impressed *KATY MC GUINNESS*

Here's the thing. In the midst of all the doom and gloom, a delightful renaissance in Dublin eating is taking place. Good riddance fayn dayning, you were always a bit of a bore, and hello to a new order of eating venues that offer a winning combination of fun, glamour, good value and great food.

Put it down to the shift in economic realities. Putative restaurateurs who couldn't afford either the key money or the rents being charged during the boom and were smart to enough to save their money find that the entry barriers have been lowered. And they are passionate about food, but not hung up on outdated notions of what makes a great restaurant. It shows in the vibrancy and individuality of the places that they're opening. Joe Macken is one such of course, but also John Farrell (on a roll from The Butcher Grill to Dillinger's to 777, with more to come), the Fumbally folk and the guys behind Coppinger Row and Damson Diner.

Dylan McGrath is of course no newcomer to the Dublin restaurant scene. From Mint in Ranelagh, where the prices matched his stratospheric ambitions, to the successful **Rustic Stone**, which has defied the naysayers (hands up) to become one of the most consistently busy restaurants in the city, and now his latest project: **Fade Street Social**, a noisy, buzzy blast of London and New York that hit the ground running when it opened last month.

Fears that the operation was intended to operate as some class of super-pub were unfounded. The food at **Fade Street Social** is no afterthought, and there's no danger of it being seen as mere soakage.

We pitch up without a booking on a Thursday evening about a week after the official opening. We're offered a high table with stools upstairs but, frankly, you want to be downstairs where the action is - the place is heaving - and we opt to hold out. It turns out to be a wait of over an hour for a pair of seats at the bar on the ground floor. It's worthwhile.

The shtick at **Fade Street Social** is FLAVOUR.

As, by the by, are the cocktails that help us while away the time - in fact reading the copy-dense cocktail menu would take about as long as a novella. It's good to see Eight Degrees and other Irish artisan beers in stock but really Fade Street is a cocktail kind of a place and it would be a shame not to indulge. The Goosegog (gooseberry puree, caramel, Absolut Citron) and - we couldn't resist the name - Away with the Fairies (more vodka, apple and cherry topped with elderflower foam) get THE GLOSS seal of approval.

The kitchens, and the ground floor stretch where we eat, overlook another section of the restaurant, yet to open when we were there in November, which McGrath says will be all about roasts and mash and good Irish comfort food and has banquettes to match. We're offered a menu featuring mainly small plates - an eclectic selection suited to casual sharing. The shtick at **Fade Street Social** is flavour, which, when you think about it, is a notion that more restaurants should consider embracing. Expect big, mouth-filling tastes - many dishes are best eaten with your fingers - rather than subtlety. From our stools at the bar we had a fine view of a production line of chefs assembling the various dishes and concluded that a touch of OCD would be a fine trait in those wanting to work here. McGrath is very much in evidence, overseeing the whole operation and mouthing instructions into a lapel microphone - all the chefs have earpieces. There are no expletives to be heard.

We ordered six plates to share, and a few extra ones arrived compliments of the kitchen. Standouts included the whole soft shell crabs with miso mayonnaise and crispy chiffon squid with a lobster mayonnaise and tarragon. We loved the sweet, almost nutty flavour of the Pata Negra Iberico pork poached with fennel powder and the crispy "airbags" filled with truffled cheese and wrapped in dried ham. A mini lobster hot dog with Béarnaise and hazelnut butter looked cute and tasted cuter, and truffle pasta with charred artichokes and Parmesan was a full-on, gutsy dish that had us asking for spoons to get the last smidge of sauce from the bowl. Asian pork belly with crisp peanut brittle was another winner.

Puddings were really unnecessary but we tried a few mouthfuls of a coconut rice pudding with lemongrass and melon sorbet and ginger mousse, a decadent banoffi, and a few tiny, airy, basil sugar doughnuts served with lychee and mango dipping sauce. If you are a pudding person, there is plenty to enjoy.

There is nothing po-faced or pretentious about any of this, Fade Street is on the money in terms of tapping into

the mood of the moment, where the appetite is for stylish informality and food that actually tastes of something. It is going to be a big hit.

With a bottle of Marble Leaf Pinot Noir 2010, and eight sharing plates our bill was €134.50 before service. ■

Fade Street Social, Fade Street, Dublin 2, 01 604 0066; www.fadestreetsocial.com.

