

TO DINE FOR

TOP OF THE POPULARS



ERNIE WHALLEY

Fade Street Social

Fade Street, Dublin 2
01 604 0066

★★★★☆ Food ★★★★★ Wine ★★★★★ Service
★★★★★ Ambience ★★★★★ Overall

In a recent review of Fade Street Social, Dylan McGrath's novus opus, a certain critic had great sport dissing her fellow reviewers. She was, she said, "probably the only critic who didn't take a sneering pot shot at the fact that he [McGrath] had moved into a popular genre".

She was, of course, referring to the fact that McGrath used to run the Michelin-starred Mint in Ranelagh, only to close it and open Rustic Stone on South George's Street — a more mainstream restaurant he still runs and one he claims "critics

don't get".

The lady's aspersion would, I'm sure, be refuted by her peers. For my part, I took not

one but two "sneering pot shots" at Rustic Stone and neither had anything to do with Master McGrath moving into a popular genre.

In each review — a couple of years apart and for different publications — I had other targets in the sights of my sneer gun, namely the ludicrousness of paying restaurant prices to cook your own food on a hot stone and, in the earlier instance, the woeful service, which extended the term "go slow" to the fringes of outer darkness.

Whatever, I'm now convinced McGrath has long forgotten my long-ago fulsome praise of Mint in print and probably hates me. If so, pity, for I hold him in high esteem. He can cook spectacularly well, as Mint proved, and has interesting ideas. He might be known for giving his brigade a hard time, but in a one-to-one he doesn't have an "arrogant" mode.

Fade Street, and its promise of different dining experiences under one roof, featured a good deal in the press before its opening, and not only in the food pages. So much so that I had a déjà vu moment as I

walked in.

I'd never been in the place, but felt I knew all 8,000 sq ft of it intimately, including its Gastro Bar, Wintergarden and our venue, the Restaurant.

The Food Nymph and her French chum, let's call her Catherine, were already ensconced in the ample tan-leather seats, relishing the energetic vibe around them. A quick glance around the room was enough to assure me that, on this night at least, there would be minimal, if any, service glitches.

I spotted the endlessly enthusiastic Eoin Tyrrell, formerly of Dublin's Pichet, and clearly an asset. The main man was in evidence, too, strutting his stuff in the open-plan kitchen behind and above us. All seemed calm.

On the night, I was but a guest. The Nymph was "at the controls" — it was her "treat". She summoned up a bottle of Stephanie Toole's bountiful Mount Horrocks Clare Valley semillon, a South Australian wine that got the evening off to a great start.

The foot of each page of the menu bears the legend "an Irish restaurant". Does that define the culinary style, I wondered, or was it a reminder to the



amnesia among the clientele that they were not in London or, say, LA?

There was an Irish stew on the card. It looked to be fairly substantial, if that was what they were eating at the next table. That apart, the food on offer didn't seem overly Irish, despite a reference on the menu to

"our ancestors" and allusions to desserts such as banoffi and sherry trifle as being staples of Irish country house hotels.

Starters appealed, more for their creativity than for Irishness. Catherine took a plate of ox tongue, a delicacy sadly neglected these days. The Nymph couldn't resist the white pudding and hot cabbage soup, an inventive neo-Irish concoction, the appeal of which was enhanced by the inclusion of slices of duck liver. She invited me to select the crispy corned beef with turnip purée, turnip slices and pickled radish with a dab of truffled honey, and I obliged. None of these disappointed in the slightest.

When it came to mains, the Nymph, with a gusto that belied her sylph-esque figure, ordered two. One of these, she declared, was "to share". This was a sirloin of aged Dexter beef, specified medium rare and recommended enthusiastically. This was good, without being memorable. Maybe Tyrrell had overhyped it. The other was the

rare-breed pork chop with rosemary, featuring in a fragrant sauce.

Catherine ordered the salmon with crab sauce, and was well pleased. I desired the roast poussin, but the bird had flown, as had the mallard and

squab listed on the menu as alternatives. Backed into a metaphorical corner, I chose a veal casserole from the specials board and got the evening's only disappointment.

Long and low-cooked stewing veal is really ace; it has the adhesive, creamy succulence that fully justifies the epithet "rib-sticking". The one in front of me seemed like a "cheat dish" — a "better" cut of veal, turned into a casserole only by the addition of cream, in character more akin, say, to beef stroganoff than to boeuf à la bourguignon. It did come with a very good creamed kale colcannon mash.

We washed these down with a Languedoc red culled from a good list filled with the products of what I recognised from my

weekly tastings as reliable importers.

We could manage only one dessert. With more than a little apprehension, we ordered "Black Forest". Praise be, it wasn't the customary sawdust-and-cheap chocolate gâteau, but a creative melange of warm baked chocolate mousse, cherry sorbet and good vanilla ice cream, overlaid with a sweet-sour cherry glaze. A fine idea, well executed.

I like McGrath's latest venture and wish it every success in the crowded "popular genre" world. Mint it's not, nor is it Rustic Stone GTI. Ambience wise, Fade Street is bold, brash, busy-buzzy, yet comfortable. Tables are far enough apart to facilitate at least semi-private conversation, and the chairs don't inflict numb bum. What more can one ask for?

McGrath and his designer have sensibly stayed away from factory chic, of which there's an excess. There's work to do on the menu, but that I'd expect from a new restaurant.





CLODAGH KILCOYNE; BRYAN MEADE

The ambience is brash yet surprisingly comfortable at Fade Street Social, the latest restaurant from McGrath, below

