

Food & Drink

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The Kitchin, Picture: Kate Chandler

Kitchin confidential

SUE LAWRENCE

LEITH has very much become a foodie destination over the past decade, with the inimitable Martin Wishart for fine dining, the laid-back Shore bistro for good fish and the buzzy Domenicos, where the pasta is so plentiful you're given doggy bags to go home with.

But now there is another star in Leith's culinary firmament. The Kitchin, on the waterfront, is worth the palaver of trying to find the entrance ("round the back, dear") to eat some of chef Tom Kitchin's outstanding food. With his pedigree - he worked alongside the famous Pierre Koffmann, Guy Savoy and Alain Ducasse - you would expect a good meal. But at incredibly reasonable prices, you get an entire experience, from drinks in the cool, glass-fronted conservatory to lunch or dinner in the charcoal-walled chic dining-room.

But all good meals start with pre-prandials, and with prosecco at £5 and Louis Roederer at only £7 a glass, served with delicious olives, you begin to feel you could be on to more than just a good thing. The starter I chose was sublime. A ravioli of langoustine in langoustine bisque was heaven in a soup bowl, with just enough of a hint of curry to lift the intense shellfish flavour. Kitchin's home-made breads are some of the best in Edinburgh, and the sourdough was particularly good for wiping the bowl clean of every last drop.

My friend Maxine had the Isle of Arran beetroot salad, a magnificent salmagundi of shaved raw and sliced cooked beetroot with new potatoes and quail's eggs - and declared it to have been competently executed. It also looked gorgeous, flanked on either side by high peaks of crisp melba toast. Our only gripe about both starter and main courses were the heavy, clunky plates they were served on, which were in complete contrast to the fine cooking.

The wine list at Kitchin is not short - though more of a novella than the weighty tomes found in some fine-dining establishments - but perfectly comprehensive. And even with the most expensive wines (2002 Puligny Montrachet and 2003 Nuits St-Georges a snip at £58; the cheapest wine is £13.50 a bottle), you get the impression that no one is trying to rip you off.

Main courses did not disappoint. Maxine's ribeye steak was cooked to a perfect rare state, though we both felt it

to the pepper sauce. Also, if we had to niggle, it was rather more of a wintry dish than a summery one. But the emphasis on fresh, locally sourced produce - organic if possible - is evident in all choices on the concise menu.

My wild halibut with sorrel was heavenly - the delicately smoked flavour a perfect match with the roast chicory.

By this time, just when you are thinking this man knows how to cook, you might be fortunate enough to spot him through the glass-fronted open kitchen. He and his front-of-house team seem the perfect combination. To produce such sublime food he must be a stickler at the stove, but his staff are not only utterly knowledgeable about both food and wine, they are also full of charm.

The waiting staff are hugely patient, as was obvious when I decided to go off-piste for pudding. Maxine, sticking to the menu, chose pannacotta with raspberries which was, again, perfect. My spiced bread ice-cream and lime-zapped mascarpone sorbet were some of the best ices I've had for a long time. Just don't think you will find these together on the menu. But if you do ask for them, expect to be greeted with a resigned "I'll see what I can do" from the gallant maître d' from Marseille.

At Kitchin you get the feeling you could ask for anything and it would exceed your expectations, provided you have managed to get there in the first place: if only the entrance were easier to find for those not familiar with the "round the back" side of the Commercial Quay restaurants. But notwithstanding the need for better signage, with these prices I strongly recommend booking a table here soon. When word gets about, waiting lists are bound to ensue.

Vital statistics

The Kitchin, 78 Commercial Quay, Edinburgh (0131 555 1755)

Out of pocket

Starters: £6-£11.50

Main courses: £15-£20

Puddings: £4.50-£6.50

2 course lunch menu: £12.50

Tipping points

Food: 16/20

Service: 17/20

Value: 17/20 (lunch); 15/20 (dinner)

Setting: 12/20

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