



Your table is ready

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This week: Mark Palmer visits The Kitchin, Leith, Edinburgh

- [Three of a kind](#)

As we approach Edinburgh from the A1, we see all sorts of signs aimed at out-of-towners.

One says, simply: "Leith's attractions." But when we reach a particular stretch of Leith and park near a shopping mall called Ocean Terminal there doesn't seem to be a single attraction to hand, unless you think that the brutal Scottish Executive building (not to be confused with the Scottish Parliament) deserves a second look.

This is disappointing because on the way into town with my GP friend Bruce and his wife, Elaine, who live an hour away, I had heard a lot about the rejuvenation of the Leith waterfront and how it's becoming a property hot spot in a city that nearly rivals London for unaffordable housing.

Really? Yes, the prostitutes may have moved on, but the new high-rise apartment buildings are gruesome, with some already showing Britney Spears-style signs of premature ageing.

Then, behind a 12-screen Vue cinema complex, we come across the dear old Royal Yacht Britannia, where for £9.50 you can go on board with a hand-held audio device and learn about the Queen's adventures on the high seas, before poking your nose into the honeymoon suite where Prince Charles and Princess Diana began their troubled marriage in 1981.

Keep going along Commercial Quay and eventually you reach number 78, where a 29-year-old called Tom Kitchin has had the easy task of calling his restaurant The Kitchin.

Tom, who looks like a less weathered version of Mick Hucknall, has only been there a year but



Starter selection: langoustine tails with boned and rolled pig's head served with a crispy ear salad

has already picked up a Michelin star, making him the youngest Scotsman to do so.

Front of house is handled by his attractive Swedish wife Michaela, who greets us warmly, then fairly pushes us off in the direction of our table.

I was rather looking forward to a drink in the front conservatory and a chance to savour the evening light before moving into the dining-room, where there's no natural light at all.



Head chef and front of house: Michaela and Tom Kitchin pose in their restaurant

With its gunmetal grey walls, dark flooring and photographs of Kitchin in mid-performance, it feels a bit like we're backstage at a regional theatre, especially when, every now and then, the door to the kitchen opens and a shaft of white light fills the room. Standing to attention at the kitchen door is a Frenchman in a gunmetal grey shirt and black trousers.

Once we're sitting comfortably he begins. "Mesdames, monsieurs, good evening, for today's specials we have..." and he does it with such a flourish, in such a perfectly tuned baritone voice, that we request two encores before he takes his bow.

There are four specials and the menu has five starters and six main courses. "From nature to plate," it says at the top.

Elaine is something of a foodie. She judges the gingerbread and quiches at agricultural shows in the Scottish borders. When our starters arrive, she sits back, admires and then starts dissecting the dishes as if looking for an alien ingredient that might disqualify one of them from the

competition.

"First, second, third," she says. Which means she thinks that Bruce's "langoustine tails from Anstruther with boned and rolled pig's head served with a crispy ear salad" have come out on top.

Certainly, it's an extraordinary combination and not one for the faint-hearted or those who have a problem with eating pig's ears as though they were pork scratchings, but my favourite is the raw mackerel, which comes wrapped in a circle of cucumber with puréed beetroot on top, followed close behind by a superbly fresh crab and pea salad.

"Would you know that we were in Scotland?" says Bruce, tetchily. It's clearly a rhetorical

question because he follows it up with a programmed rant about how trendy restaurants in Sydney, New York, Barcelona and, well, Leith all look virtually identical.

"You miss the point," says Elaine. "You know you're in Scotland by looking at the menu." And she's right. Every dish features meat or poultry raised in Scotland or fish caught just off it.

Fittingly, here comes her roast duck from nearby Loomswood Farm, served with locally grown red and spring cabbage and a peppery sauce created by the Edinburgh boy next door.

It also features dollops of celeriac and broccoli purée. "This," says Elaine, "is the best duck I have ever tasted and the sauce is magnificent." Bruce and I have canon of Scottish lamb, stuffed with spinach, red peppers, kidney and olives.

It's a bit busy for me and I wish Tom had toned down the olives in this orchestra of culinary high notes, but there's no denying the technical brilliance of each of the instruments at his disposal. Bruce's only complaint is that there are no mashed potatoes, to help soak up the juices.

The restaurant is completely full by the time we order puddings. Anyone planning to be in Edinburgh for the festival is advised to book a table sharpish.

Bruce, now more relaxed, says his crème brûlée with an orange topping and white-chocolate sorbet on the side is "beautifully balanced", while Elaine purrs contentedly over her chocolate tart with orange coulis.

But the pick of the puddings is my summer berries in white wine sabayon, raspberry coulis and vanilla ice cream, served in an old-fashioned martini cocktail glass.

"This isn't really the trendy part of Leith," says Elaine, as we head back in the dispiriting direction of Ocean Terminal. No, but it soon will be if Tom Kitchin and his French restaurant manager keep performing like this night after night.

• **The Kitchin**, 78 Commercial Quay, Leith, Edinburgh,
course dinner for two, including wine, £120.

0131 5551755 . Three-

Mark's rating: 7/10



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