



EatDrink



The Bistro at Tankardstown House creates smart, seasonal food
BARRY CROHIN

Almost the full Tankard

The Bistro
Tankardstown House
Slane, Co Meath
041-9824621
www.tankardstown.ie
Chef: Tom Coffey

Tankardstown House suffers the eternal struggle of all boutique hotels: trying to find a balance between hosting 'staying guests' and providing a 'dining only' revenue. Its creation of a garden village set in the lower courtyard of the main house goes some way to deliver on this.

Two restaurants and a shop sit around a neatly-clipped garden with plenty of outdoor seating, which makes for a cheery spot on a fine day. Our arrival on a bustling April Saturday, however, had us scurrying inside for The Bistro.

The problem with this is that you travel to stately homes to soak in some of their glory, and this is not possible if you have to rush inside from the arrival area, which is set apart from the house itself. The only view of the house's imposing classical facade, therefore, is on the drive along its perimeter.

The Bistro itself is a narrow, cottage-like space and oddly small when you consider its exterior resembles a massive stone barn. Inside is a series of small rooms decorated in the country-kitchen-on-steroids-style. We were seated in the slightly larger dining area.

Food

Reviewed by
Ross Golden-Bannon



I ordered water and soon staff were whistling by on futile journeys, hands empty and displaying an air of polite panic. Finally, the water arrived (but not the sparkling type we had ordered) along with a basket of ordinary bread. I was instantly put off by the dark moons under the tops of the fingernails of one of our servers, but thankfully that person didn't hang around. Our next server took our order efficiently, although it was clear no briefing had taken place at the start of the shift – as the wait staff didn't know the specials.

I ordered the soup of the day (€5), a cream of white onion soup with cheese (staff knowledge of the cheese was thin on the ground).

What arrived was a gentle, subtle soup. Further delights were to be found in the showder (€7) with smoked haddock, potatoes, peas, fennel and herbs, along with bright spring onions, petits pois and chives. There was a lot going on here and yet it was beautifully married into a bowl of spring comfort.

We also ordered the open prawn sandwich (€6.95) with a lemon and herb aioli and baby gem, which was

Watching the pennies

Starter: soup of the day €6
Main course: Caesar salad €10
Dessert: apple and berry crumble with vanilla ice cream and cream €6
Wine: Living Rock, Chenin Blanc Chardonnay, South Africa, 2008 €20
Dinner for two: €64

Breaking the bank

Starter: Caesar salad with chicken €8
Main course: chargrilled 8oz dry-aged ribeye with fries, salad and garlic butter €16.95
Dessert: rice pudding with boozy prunes €6
Wine: Givry 1er Cru, Domaine Mouton, Burgundy, 2006 €50
Dinner for two: €111.90

Tomás Clancy rates the wine list

This is an eclectic, compelling list of 26 wines. You can see this in the choice of the champagne – not a Grande Marque but one from a tiny, nine-hectare operation founded in 1935. Champagne Fluteau (€75) is a prize-winning wine that is a good choice at this price. Half the wines cost under €30 a bottle and there are six wines by the glass ranging from €5 to €7.50 (Trenttham Estate, Pinot Noir 2007). There is Drusian Prosecco NV at €7 a glass or a well-priced €33 a bottle. The best value for the quality white wine is the Bodegas Mont La Reina, Verdejo 2008 (€21.50), while the red quality for value star is the Casa Tamaya, Carmenero Limar Valley, Chile 2007 (€24). Star wine of the list is the stunning Laurenz V, Friendly Grüner Veltliner, Austria 2007 (€33). This is a gorgeous, gentle Grüner with green melon and spicy tones made by superstar Lenz Moser.

Rating: ***

served with Guinness bread and potato salad. The prawns were a little light in flavour and the carb quotient was high, though the potato salad deserves a special mention.

For the main course I had the special of 'cured' beef (€14.95) with champ of chives and cabbage. There was some confusion over the name: did they mean corned beef? No, 'cured'. To me it was corned beef, but perhaps the name

changes across the country, and a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. This rose was a vivid pink in colour, crumbly, with tender strings of lip-smacking meat that flaked to the pull. It was all near heaven, served with a classic, buttery champ.

The biting cold outside made it a day for pies, so my foodie friend ordered the pie of the day (€13.50), made with creamy chicken and full,

herby flavours. Its delicate lid of pastry completed the look and balance of texture and flavour, although the dressing on the salad was more skimpy bikini than formal dress.

The 'confit' of free range chicken with creamy mash, roasted vegetables and a Bourgogne sauce of bacon, onion and mushrooms (€14.95) looked impressive and before it was quickly eaten up, I managed to get a quick taste of some tender chicken and earthy flavours.

Which brings me to the sourcing, none of which is mentioned on the menu. This lack of information is even more strange, as a new farmers' market started at Tankardstown House on Easter Sunday. Still, the beef's origin on the menu is a legal requirement, if not a zeitgeist necessity.

Desserts cost €6 each and include a chocolate brownie which was astonishingly light, with some superb ice cream. The sticky toffee pudding had all the seductive looks of a temptress dessert, but its slightly dry texture failed to deliver on its promise. It came with some red berry garnish which was bitter and, well, a waste of money.

There is plenty to like at The Bistro, but perhaps a Sunday visit would be more fun. It's open on Saturdays as well. The kitchen here happily and enthusiastically creates smart, seasonal food made with tender, loving care. But they just seem to have forgotten to tell front of house staff, who are in need of some TLC of their own.

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