

Going Out Food & Drink

Poultry in motion


Table Talk
The Hen House

★★★★☆

I was a Friday night, and I'd decided to kill two birds with one stone (pardon the pun. Actually, don't. There are plenty more poultry puns to come) – a restaurant review followed by a theatre review.

However, getting out of work late combined with schlepping all the way to Dún Laoghaire meant something had to give, and so for the sake of our collective digestive system, we decided to ditch the play altogether and linger over dinner. Feathers unruffled.

New restaurant The Hen House feels like a chain restaurant – and that's meant as a compliment in that it feels well-established in the manner of, say, the UK's Giraffe, Las Iguanas or Leon.

'Dublin city could learn from these impressive hatchlings'

There's a fine line between a 'theme' and a 'concept' when it comes to restaurants but The Hen House has the latter down pat, its USP of free-range, Irish, rotisserie chickens cooked in a wood-burning oven harmonised, rather than over-egged, by bright greens, exposed brickwork, candles and sprigs of rosemary on every table.

There's also a good range of seating, from private dining to convivial circular booths, banquettes and bar stools, plus a long rustic bench table enhanced by a fixture of exposed light bulbs, so you won't feel cooped-up.

Despite the whole chicken concept, for starters he plucked the fresh salt and spice gambas, and I the grilled halloumi with semi-dried tomato and pine nuts. Cockadoodle-doo! 'Aw, I could suck on these...', said he, of his prawn husks having demolished their plump, soft innards fried in a lip-snacking spiced marinade. So much so that he snubbed the superfluous chilli coriander jam ('if anything, a cream-based sauce would be better'). My halloumi salad meanwhile was equally satisfying, a simple-but-effective hillock of baby leaf salad enrobed with generous shards of the squeaky cheese and juicy tomatoes.

My fish of the day main maintained the well-executed, no-nonsense theme: two pieces of fresh mackerel sprinkled with chopped parsley and lemon zest, accompanied by a piquant, olive oil rich sauce of fine chopped tomatoes, capers,

red onions, plus a generous bowl of baby leaf salad. I thought I'd read on the menu that there'd be a potato element but nothing came. Perhaps I'd misread it. There was definitely a cock-up though in that the salted sugar snap peas never arrived (but didn't appear on the bill, thankfully, so no need to get in a flap). His piri piri chicken was suitably hot and spicy, succulent, and came with good, honest home-cooked chips.

Alas, cheesecake of the day was the ubiquitous Baileys so I plumped for the orange blossom yogurt – deliciously creamy and festooned with honey, chopped pistachio, pumpkin and flax seeds. He took the lard-ass option – Eton mess, a veritable confection of cream, meringue and fresh berries.

Our bill totalled €73, including two pints each, although there are early bird options. Service was sincere and friendly. Dublin city could learn from these impressive hatchlings emerging from the suburbs...

Lucy White

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www.thehenhouse.ie