

CHOICE TABLES | DUBLIN

Blood Pudding, Beetroot, Boxyty and Blaa

Dublin raises Irish cuisine to new heights, emphasizing local specialties and ingredients.

By DAVID FARLEY

Stoneybatter, the main street that runs through the working-class neighborhood of the same name in north Dublin, is lined with traditional pubs. L. Mulligan Grocer, as its name suggests, is housed in a former pub and food shop. And it fits right in: A long bar, lined with taps, dominates the right side of the room. But venture toward the back, walk up three steps, and you'll find something less predictable: a packed dining room of 19 tables, diners feasting on dishes like pan-fried hake in a carrot purée, as servers scurry past.

The gastro pub, a movement that began across the Irish Sea in London, took a surprisingly long time to take hold here. Opened in 2010, L. Mulligan Grocer was among the first wave of gastro pubs in a city that is now dotted with them. It also happens to be serving some of the most exciting food in Dublin.

But it's not just gastro pubs that are stirring up the Irish capital's dining scene. Cuisine in post-Celtic Tiger Dublin has adopted an inward gaze, with new restaurants, both pubs and upscale bistros, emphasizing locally sourced ingredients and offering creative takes that celebrate Irish cuisine in a variety of ways.

In November, I spent a week in Dublin eating my way through some of these restaurants, most of which opened in the last few years. It was my fourth visit to this stately city of Georgian townhouses and lively pubs, and I've never eaten better

L. Mulligan Grocer



"You never would have seen this a few years ago," said my dining companion, a lifelong Dubliner, referring to the exhaustive listings of farms and food purveyors on the menu. The black pudding, the starter we shared, came from Jack McCarthy, a well-regarded butcher in County Cork. It arrived in the shape of baguette slices and was the freshest I'd ever had. Slightly crispy on the outside and pleasantly gooey on the inside, it put to shame the deft and bland black pudding I'd eaten as part of Irish breakfasts in countless pubs and hotel breakfast buffets.

For mains, we had the burger, a blend of venison and bacon, the latter exuding a seductive smokiness. It sat on top of a boxty, a traditional potato pancake that, with the recent interest in Irish cuisine, has started turning up more on restaurant menus in years. The pork belly, accompanied by a baseball-sized black pudding croquette, echoed the textural contrasts of the black pudding starter: I cut through a crispy top layer of skin to find a moist, flavorful piece of pork.

L. Mulligan eschews the usual array of go-to tipples for a wide selection of Irish craft beers and hard-to-find whiskeys; this might be the only pub in Dublin that doesn't serve Guinness, something that would have been heretical in years past. Instead, order a pint of Bru Dhub, a dry Irish stout with hints of caramel, or a glass of the smoky Connemara single malt.

L. Mulligan Grocer, 18 Stoneybatter; 353-1-670-9889; lmulligangrocer.com. Dinner for two, without drinks or tip, is about 50 euros, or \$65 at \$1.31 to the euro.

Brasserie at the Marker Hotel

Gastro pubs aren't the only type of Dublin restaurants offering a modern spin on Irish cuisine. The in-house restaurant at the stylish Marker Hotel, opened in last April in the Docklands neighborhood (and opposite the Daniel Libeskind-designed Bord Gáis Energy Theater), bills itself as "contemporary Irish." The setting certainly reflects that: The dining room, just off the lobby, is set underneath a slanted ceiling of irregularly placed five-foot panels — an almost cubist approach to restaurant design.

The menu, from the chef Gareth Mullins, nicely balances two strengths of Irish cuisine: surf and turf. As at L. Mulligan Grocer, the Brasserie serves black pudding croquettes (the Brasserie's are from Tommy Doherty in County Meath), a dish Mr. Mullins brought over from his last kitchen stint, at the Cellar Bar in the Merrion Hotel. While I was tempted, I figured one dose of black pudding was enough for this week. Instead, I started with a beetroot soup, with caramelized onions and spinach ricotta balls bobbing in the subtle translucent-red broth. The lamb fillet, a few small pieces of delicate, fork-tender meat accompanied by an eggplant purée, combined Irish ingredients with a Middle Eastern taste profile. I usually avoid ordering itself



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lops when they're paired with another element that might eclipse their natural flavor. But in this case, the shallow pool of butternut squash purée that they were wading in complemented the briny taste of the scallops.

The Irish like to claim their beef is the best in the world. The Brasserie's rib-eye, cooked medium rare, proved a persuasive argument. The meat had a mushy, melt-in-the-mouth interior that paired well with a surprisingly oaky Rioja crianza. My dining companion loved the roasted venison, which had a vague but not unpleasant gamy taste.

Brasserie at the Marker Hotel, Grand Canal Square; 353-1-687-5100; themarkerhoteldublin.com. Dinner for two, without drinks or tip, is about 80 euros.

The Hot Stove

Parnell Square, on the city's north side, has been home to one of Ireland's best restaurants since 1992. Chapter One, inside the Dublin Writers' Museum, has held a Michelin star since 2007 — yet it hasn't helped create a thriving dining scene in the area. The Hot Stove, which first fired up its burners about a year ago, might

change that.

This elegant restaurant, set in the basement of a Georgian townhouse, is run by the chef Joy Beattie, who logged time in the kitchen at Chapter One's outpost in Kent, England. If the diner needed a reminder of how locally sourced some of the menu items are here, there's a warning at the bottom of the menu that some game dishes may still contain pellet shots.

There were no such foreign objects in the oxtail Wellington starter — just meaty deliciousness wrapped in a puff pastry and sitting on a row of Irish chestnut mushrooms. Likewise, the Hot Stove chowder, filled with mussels and chunks of salmon, boasted a thick buttery, dill-spiked broth that was deeply flavored and satisfying. Pork again made appearance, in the form of a pairing of loin and belly, nicely executed: four tender bite-size pieces of loin sharing a plate with a rectangular block of crispy belly. The extra crispy duck fat fries that I ordered as a side dish proved to be a salty but palatable companion to the pork dish.

Hot Stove, 38 Parnell Square West; 353-1-874-7778; thehotstove.ie. Dinner for two, without drinks or tip, is about 75 euros.

Clockwise from top, a bartender prepares drinks at the tapas area of Fade St. Social; at Hatch & Sons Irish Kitchen; sea bass surrounded by cauliflower florets at the Brasserie at the Marker Hotel; dinner at the Brasserie at the Marker Hotel; smoked fish board at Hatch & Sons; scallop dish at Fade St. Social; scotch egg, one of the signature dishes at L. Mulligan Grocer; a co-owner of L. Mulligan Grocer serves two patrons.



Hatch & Sons Irish kitchen

There's sandwich bread and then there is blaa. This bread roll, made in Waterford, about 100 miles south of Dublin, was reportedly introduced to the town in the 17th century by Huguenot immigrants. The town is still making blaa — in fact, in November the European Union granted the blaa Protected Geographical Indication status — but it wasn't until recently you could find them outside of Waterford.

Enter Hatch & Sons, which may not be innovating in the style of some of my other stops, but celebrates Irish classics — blaa included — in a way that is equally satisfying. In the basement of the charming Little Museum of Dublin on St. Stephen's Green, this lunch-only two-room casual restaurant serves mostly salads, Irish cheese and charcuterie boards, and a few rotating entrees. The real draw, though, is the selection of sandwiches made with blaa that is delivered daily from Waterford. I ordered two: goat cheese from Fivemiletown Creamery in Northern Ireland with beetroot relish and spiced beef with onion relish. It turns out that blaa rolls, which are far less boring than the name suggests (the name, reportedly, is a bastardized version of "blanc," French for "white"), are the perfect sandwich bread — crispy and flaky but oh so soft. Afterward, I wandered the three-floor museum, which is dedicated to the 20th-century history of the city, and kept wondering if I should head down to the basement for one more blaa.

Hatch & Sons Irish Kitchen, 15 St. Stephens Green; 353-1-661-0075; hatchandsons.co. Lunch for two, without drinks or tip, is about 20 euros.

Fade Street Social

When Dylan McGrath, a judge on the Irish version of "Masterchef," opened Fade Street Social in late 2012, he kicked the Dublin dining landscape up a notch. In fact, Fade Street is less of a restaurant and more of a culinary complex, with a "gastro bar," a restaurant and a winter garden squeezed the multilevel 8,000-square-foot space in the center of town. The bar menu is made up of quasi-experimental tapas dishes (think pork belly and peanut brittle or cured salmon with truffle honey). The restaurant fare was decidedly tamer, though still ambitious. I arrived to a packed house on a Monday night. An open kitchen overlooked yet another subterranean dining room, as chefs went about their work and a brick oven fire roared.

The first arrival was beef tongue and scallop carpaccio. The tongue, in the form of little croquettes, paired well with the raw scallop, but the goopy lump of truffle cheese bread that it all rested upon was one element too many. Next came the cabbage soup with white pudding. The thick green soup could have stood on its own but the pork-laden hunk of pudding in the middle added an extra level of flavor and texture.

Then, the dish I'd been most excited about: duck liver mousse. Served in a squat Mason jar, it was really like a thick white bean soup studded with bits of smoky bacon and a broth made with unctuous duck liver. It was rich and filling and immensely pleasurable. Finally, the waiter put down the lamb stew in front of me. I was almost too full to continue, but seeing the dollops of cream and potato mousse sharing bowl space with chunks of lamb, I couldn't resist. The dish rather summed up my week of eating in Dublin: an Irish classic but updated for the 21st-century palate.

Fade Street Social, 6 Fade Street; 353-1-604-0066; fadedstreetsocial.com. Dinner for two, without drinks or tip, is about 75 euros.