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Restaurant review: Piglet Wine Bar, Dublin 2



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Leslie Williams

Piglet is an authentic Italian wine bar with profoundly good food, excellent wine and a warm welcoming atmosphere.



I CONFESS I've always secretly hated my given name.

My first name ensures that 70% of my post is addressed to Miss or Ms and Williams is the third most common name in the UK and USA so all the best emails and twitter handles were long gone by the time I got to the internet.

I mention this because arguably my favourite name is Enrico Fantasia. Add in the romance that Enrico grew up in Venice, once played French horn for the La Fenice orchestra and then opened a successful Venetian restaurant before coming to Ireland to become a wine importer (Grape Circus Wines).

Enrico's most recent project is Piglet which he opened late in 2015 with Thibault Harang formerly of Pichet.

The venue is just a few steps down from Christ Church Cathedral on Cows Lane, a pedestrian street that has an interesting mix of cafés, vintage furniture shops, yoga studios and apartments.

The street is arguably the only part of Temple Bar that you would want to live on as it is relatively quiet and far enough away (just barely) from the hedonistic bacchanalia that constitutes 90% of the quarter.

The venue used to be an old fashioned trattoria called La Dolce Vita which I liked but only visited occasionally — let's just say that I've been in Piglet four times since it opened.

It is important to note that Piglet is an Osteria (wine bar) rather than a restaurant so the emphasis is on the (excellent) wine with some cheese and meat boards for sharing plus tapas and small dishes.

The wine list is not too intimidating and has a good mix of mainly organic wines from Spain, Italy and France including some large format bottles for sharing.

We opted for Shall We Dance Chianti which is made on Sting's estate in Tuscany (€39) plus extra glasses of the Italian house wine Un Litro (€8.50).

I've eaten my way through the menu here more than once and given Enrico's connection with Sheridans Cheesemongers (he sources their wines), the quality of meats and cheeses can't be beaten.

Add in some creativity — bruschetta with duck gizzard, confit sardines, lardo with bitter honey or with mortadella and artichoke — and you will find yourself dropping in whenever you are near.

If you are properly hungry there are also big bold main courses including confit duck with cassoulet and five fresh classic pasta dishes (the pasta is from an artisan fresh pasta producer in Basilicata in Southern Italy).

Occasionally there will be specials (if Enrico or Thibault find something interesting in the market) but I'm not sure I would ever tire of eating the melting duck confit; the Rigatoni al Gricia; or Orecchiette with peppers, ricotta and almonds, or with homemade sausage ragu and smoked paprika.

Enrico, being Italian, means the pasta is cooked immaculately and I think it is worth dwelling on one dish — Rigatoni alla Gricia. This is a classic Rome/Lazio dish, a kind of Carbonara without the eggs.

Guanciale is not unlike pancetta but stronger tasting and made from pork cheek and jowl rather than the belly and is said to be essential to a true Carbonara — Italians can be a little dogmatic (dare I say fascistic...) about such things!

This is the best guanciale I have yet to taste — a combination of salty porky umami and lingering sweetness.

Once the rigatoni was cooked (just barely — there was textural profundity in every bite), the *sutéed* guanciale and onions were mixed into the rigatoni along with some starchy pasta water and grated cheese.

That's all, but you will swear the chef has added some secret luscious binding ingredient as the contrast between the sweet intense meat and viscous sauce and the al-dente pasta is a thing of beauty.

I've run out of space to go into more detail but there is not a dud dish on this menu — the Tiramisu is one of the best I've tasted and the chocolate cake is heavenly.

Value is keen (bruschetta cost €3 but are large, small plates €8-9, mains cost €14-18, desserts cost €6).

To return to names, Piglet seems far too modest for a place this good but perhaps that is the point — the simple can also be profound.

THE TAB

A meal for three — sharing a selection of small plates, two main courses, two desserts plus a bottle and two extra glasses of wine: €135

When

Monday-Thursday: 12pm-10.30pm

Friday-Saturday: 12pm-12am

Sunday: 1pm-10.30pm

The Verdict

Food: 8/10

Drink: 8/10

Service: 8/10

Ambience: 8/10

Value: 8/10

In a Sentence: An authentic Italian wine bar with profoundly good food, excellent wine and a warm welcoming atmosphere.

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