

Piglet Wine Bar: 'Each tapas dish is a delicious morsel of full-on flavour'

Piglet Wine Bar, Cow's Lane, Old City, Temple Bar, Dublin 2. (01) 707 9786



The Piglet Wine Bar. Photo: Frank Mc Grath

Katy McGuinness

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It's hard to believe that it's 20 years since Eden opened on Meeting House Square, with chef Eleanor Walsh in charge of a kitchen delivering modern Irish food that was full of flavour and that celebrated high-quality local ingredients. Eden was something brand new for Dublin; no wonder it was an immediate hit.

I remember being so determined to eat there as often as I possibly could that I would bring along a baby who was still being breastfed and park him under the table in a carrycot. If he happened to wake up while we were still eating, the glamorous Aileen Devlin, who ran front of house with tact and charm (there were never enough tables for all those who wanted them), would swoop in and pick him up, put him on her shoulder and carry on with her work.

Eden is long gone from Meeting House Square, and these days one tends not to think of Temple Bar as somewhere to go in search of good food. Klaw, which serves excellent seafood in a space no bigger than a shoebox, is an honour-able exception; Rosa Madre and Il Vicoletto are others.

And there is Piglet, which may bill itself primarily as a wine bar, an osteria in Italian, but serves food that is more interesting than the plates of cheese and charcuterie that we have come to expect in Irish wine bars. Not that there's anything wrong with cheese and charcuterie, of course - you can get them at Piglet too; the cheese comes from Sheridans, which can only be a good thing - and they can be a fine accompaniment to good wine and stimulating conversation. Nevertheless, it's pleasing to see something different.

We have booked to come in after Jean Butler's darkly beautiful *This Is an Irish Dance* around the corner at the Project, and are given a choice of a table for two upstairs on the mezzanine level, or one end of a bigger table tucked away at the back where we'll have a better view of the comings and goings behind the bar, and in and out of the tiny kitchen. The pair already in situ at the larger table look as if they are coming to the end of their meal, so we opt to be downstairs, but it turns out that Daddy is only getting going in terms of telling his daughter how much he loves her, and how proud he and Mummy are of her. And Daddy is pretty fond of the sound of his own voice and might - back in the day - have fancied himself as something of a thespian. On and on he goes. We do our best to ignore him, but it isn't easy.

The proprietors of Piglet are Enrico Fantasia, an Italian wine importer, and Frenchman Thibaud Harang, who we recognise from Town Bar & Grill and whose wine advice turns out to be spot on, with the selection of an Enrico Santini Poggio al Moro 2006 that's spicy yet velvety, and far more elegant and highly concentrated than its €45 price tag would lead one to expect.

In terms of food, there are tapas, sharing boards, bruschetta, salads, small plates and larger plates on offer.

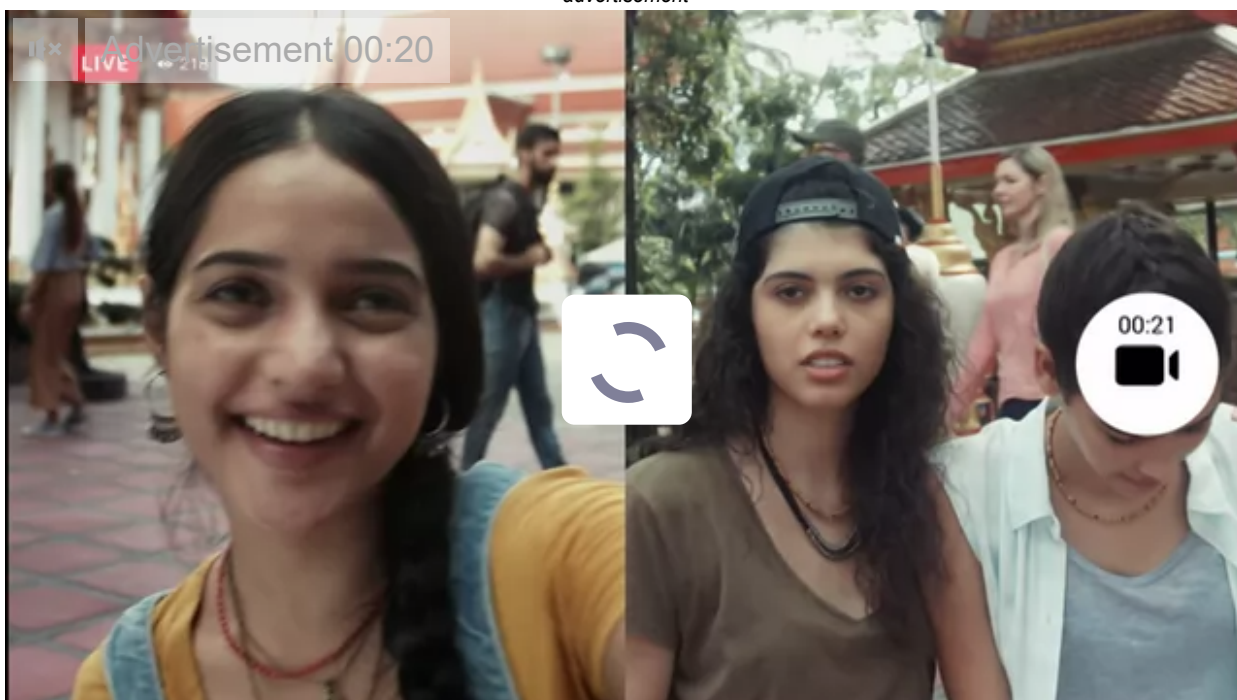
The tapas are €3 each, and each one is a delicious morsel of full-on flavour on top of a tranche of Le Levain sourdough. There are duck gizzards with garlic butter, for instance, and smoked eel on a white bean purée, melting lardo with bitter honey and softly unctuous pork cheeks topped with salsa verde. Half a dozen oysters come with an anchovy foam that's not a foam - it looks like that awful synthetic cream that comes out of an aerosol can, topped with a single anchovy - and does nothing for the dish. No matter, the oysters themselves are super-fresh, briny and delicious.

An octopus salad is full of crunch with celery and rocket - there are olives, lovage seeds, capers and raisins too - but the dressing lacks oomph despite the mention of chilli oil. A trio of luscious head-on prawns pil pil made with espelette peppers and good olive oil sits atop more of the fine sourdough.

We share a plate of orecchiette with a Gubbeen sausage ragù with the kick of smoked paprika that's richly rib-sticking and very good. And finally, because by now we have been rumbled, there is the gift of a few gorgeous handmade dark chocolates from L'Art du Chocolat in Maynooth, where French chocolatiers Cyril Borie and Nicolas Bateau are doing interesting work.

Piglet is not going to win any prizes in the interior design category at the next restaurant awards (what do you mean, there isn't one?). It's a little bit chaotic and untogether, but it feels authentic and when the weather warms up and you can sit outside and pretend that you are in Italy, then that's not going to matter a whit. It is most definitely a date spot.

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Our bill comes to €115 before service. We have been looked after well - the staff are young, friendly and charmingly Italian.

THE RATING

7/10 food

8/10 ambience

8/10 value for money

23/30

ON A BUDGET

A glass of house wine with four tapas is going to cost around €20.

ON A BLOW-OUT

A few tapas, and a couple of small plates, followed by duck leg confit and tiramisu will cost around €80 for two. Add a bottle of Domaine Bonneau du Martray Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru 2008 for €220, and your bill will hit €300 before service.

THE HIGH POINT

Brilliant wine knowledge and service. My advice: put yourself in the hands of the experts.

THE LOW POINT

The too-loud conversation of our table companions.

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[Terra Madre Cafe on Bachelors Walk, Dublin. Picture: Arthur Carron](#)

Review - Terra Madre: 'Italian food of the type that you so rarely find in Ireland'

A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of walking around the Airfield Estate in Dundrum, Co Dublin with chefs Robin Gill and Luke Matthews. Gill is Irish-born but London-based, and owns The Dairy and The Manor in Clapham, South London, both excellent, while...

[Vegetable soup](#)

Taste test: The best Vegetable Soup you can buy

Katy McGuinness The temperature's dropped and it's time for soup. We tested vegetable soup - all but one were 'classic' versions rather than anything more exotic.

The Irish cheese-making sector is vibrant these days and with so much choice around, there is no reason for patriotic shoppers to buy cheese from any other country. We tested cow's milk brie and camembert-style cheeses on the day we bought them.

Taste test: Irish Brie and Camembert

Katy McGuinness The Irish cheese-making sector is vibrant these days and with so much choice around, there is no reason for patriotic shoppers to buy cheese from any other country. We tested cow's milk brie and camembert-style cheeses on the day we bought them.

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