



A fresh start

Former Chapter One chef's seasonal approach is a delight

ON A BUDGET

The four-course Sunday lunch is priced at €45.

ON A BLOW OUT

A five-course dinner for two will cost €110 before drinks or service.

THE HIGH POINT

A civilised new restaurant offering a sophisticated food experience without appearing to try too hard. It reminds me of Chapter One, Cathal Leonard's alma mater.

THE LOW POINT

Opinions are divided about the art on the walls.

KATY MCGUINNESS

RESTAURANT REVIEW

POTAGER

7 Church Street, Skerries, Co Dublin; potager.ie

I'm on the hunt for somewhere interesting for Sunday lunch that can accommodate a wheelchair user. It's not as straightforward as you might think, partly because the number of restaurants that are wheelchair-accessible is fewer than it should be, and also because my friend is — how do I put this diplomatically? — not the easiest person to please. Having worked in the restaurant industry for years, and eaten in more fancy restaurants around the world than just about anyone I know, his standards are high. He is not going to be happy with any old carvery, that's for sure.

No pressure so.

Cathal Leonard and his partner, Sarah Ryan, opened their Potager restaurant in what was The Red Bank in Skerries earlier this year. During the backwards and forwards that goes on between the person making the booking and Sarah, who looks after the front-of-house-side of things (and the wine — of which more later), she could not have been more helpful in arranging the exact set-up in terms of accessibility, and any limitations thereon.

The lunch menu gives the option of four or five courses. If you opt for five, that's the only decision that you have to make until it comes to dessert — if you opt for four, it's a matter of choosing between two main courses.

We like the simplicity of this structure; it's clear from the menu that the kitchen takes a hyper-seasonal approach, treading lightly around the subtle changes suggested by nature from week to week. And while Potager may not have its own potager, it's using produce from some of the best growers in the area, including the McNally family in nearby Balrickard (if you spot a cucamelon, a vine fruit that tastes akin to a sour cucumber, on a Dublin menu, you can be pretty sure that it comes from the McNallys).

Exemplary breads — a fermented brown served with Cuinneog butter and potato bread with soft, fresh ricotta and kale pesto — get us off to a good start.

A tapioca cracker topped with oyster mayonnaise and fennel, and a cylinder formed from a sliver of salt-baked kohlrabi wrapped around a filling of chestnut mushroom are the snacks. The oyster mayonnaise is particularly good. Next up, a silky leek soup topped with baked potato foam and crunchy little morsels of what I think is potato skin and some class of an ash, perhaps leek. It's a riff on vichyssoise, one of the best inventions ever, and it's delectable.

Iridescent-skinned cured mackerel is art, its beauty set off by greengages, pickled cucamelon and an intensely green herb juice; the flavours subtle and restrained, while wood pigeon — pink breast and a little croquette of slow-braised leg — pairs beautifully with classic autumn flavours of beetroot, blackberry and chocolate.

By way of main course, there is brill with seasonal adjuncts of sweetcorn, girolles, courgette and basil, a butter sauce puddled about the plate for good measure. The alternative is Killenure Dexter beef striploin — three modest slices rather than a big steak, lest I lead anyone astray — with roasted onions, celeriac and runner beans topped with a crisp, melt-in-the-mouth stem of cavolo nero.

We share a delightful, tangy Velvet Cloud sheep's yoghurt sorbet with figs, lemon curd and honeycomb, and a square prism of set geranium custard that underwhelms, this latter accompanied by crumbs of gingerbread, slices of blood peach and a modicum of (peach?) ice cream. A cheese plate — Hegarty's cheddar, Crozier Blue, tomatillo chutney — is generous.

We drink the unusual (and quite wonderful) Magma 2016 from Adega dos Biscoitos (€62) as recommended by Sarah, that's fruit, saline and mineral all at once, and the Or Blanc 2018 from Domaine Fabien Trosset 2018 in Savoie (my choice) (€47) that's less interesting.

"(Almost) foam-free fine dining," is the verdict of my expert friend. "I loved it."

Potager makes Skerries a destination. The bill for lunch for four comes to €293 before service.

The rating

9/10 FOOD
9/10 AMBIENCE
9/10 VALUE

27/30

Fuss free: Potager does sophisticated food without trying too hard



PICTURE: KYRAN O'BRIEN