



## West Restaurant at The 12 Hotel

I had been for dinner at The West in Barna shortly after it opened and as I have been noticing that the awards were starting to pile up — particularly for the wine list — I decided that another visit was in order. I chose what I thought would be a quiet Wednesday night (it turned out to be packed) and we were seated at a window table. As the views are not part of the attraction the emphasis is on lots of exotic lighting and more candles than would light a cathedral. The décor really suits an evening meal and with winter approaching it is a perfect ambience to detract from the misery outside.

As Fergus O'Halloran is one serious sommelier I let him match a white with the starter and a red with the main course. This turned out to be a wise choice as he chose a Riesling from Austria called Wohlmuth, and if any of you are non Riesling drinkers I think this may convert you, cost is €30 per bottle. I also noted that they serve Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc by the glass for €12 or €48 per bottle, now that is pretty unusual as it is such a hard wine to find and apparently it an extremely good seller. With our main course we had an excellent Cotes Du Rhone called Les Amis Chanteuses.

But now it's time to talk about the food, and while many of you may have experienced the superb bar food in the 12 downstairs, I think The West Restaurant upstairs has not had the reputation

locally that it deserves. I have had comments in the past from people who said it was quite expensive, however if you look at the 'great taste' deal being offered it is one of the best bargains in the county. I started with a marinated organic salmon and blossom, €7.50, and my companion had Atlantic fish cake, €8.00. On the face of it these do not sound adventurous but let me tell you that there were both a work of art and a taste sensation. The salmon and blossom is a combination of marinated salmon and pollack cut so thinly that it nearly evaporated, and presented with a most unusual spoonful of samphire, sprouts, and lavender oil. If you want a light, healthy starter with an unusual twist, this is it. The Atlantic fish cake when cut open revealed a whole scallop inside and floating on a passion fruit sauce, while served over the most delicious marinated asparagus and dillisk. All of these worked perfectly with the Riesling.

For mains, I chose

braised beef with mash and baby vegetables, €19.50, while my companion choose fillet of halibut, €26.50, served with papaya and mango salsa and organic rocket. Both main courses included a serving of vegetable and potatoes. The beef had been slow cooked for 12 hours and the combination of the melting in the mouth meat with the fabulous sauce was for me one of the best dishes I have eaten, and at the price of €19.50 it is a bargain. In fact you can choose from the Great Taste menu and get this main course plus a starter or dessert and a cocktail for €20.09 — now that is serious value combined with serious food. The Great Taste menu is available all night on Wednesday and Thursday and between 6pm and 7pm on a Friday and Saturday. You can up your spend to €25 and have three courses plus a cocktail. This menu can be eaten either in the bar or The West Restaurant.

Halibut is my favourite fish and pretty difficult to cook to perfection. The chef was again a winner here, cooked just on the point and it just melted in the mouth. The accompanying salsa worked a treat.

For desserts, I ordered some home made ice-creams: avocado, sweet potatoes, and black treacle were the flavours on offer while my guest ordered wanoffi. The ice-creams were the creamiest I have had and, while not tasting particularly like their descriptions, were divine. I would traipse back across town just for the ice-creams. The wanoffi was served in a cocktail glass and judging by all the oohs and aahs it was delicious. It is made from fudge mousse, caramelised bananas, and homemade granola.

Congratulations to chef and his team for doing something different and doing it very well — as Arnie said — I'll be back.

