

REMEMBERING things with a hangover is not my forte, but like a piercing pain from the back of my head I suddenly recalled an arrangement made earlier in the week to go for dinner.

The company would include one of my closest friends who I'd be promising a meal for decades, his girlfriend and mine too, with the choice of restaurant at my behest.

So scrambling out of bed sometime around lunchtime and ringing enough places to allow Eircom's executives to actually become popular, I was resigned to eating in McDonald's until my father-in-law, for want of a better description, suggested Odells.

Hoping to eat early without feeling as if we were out for lunch, I was told that 7.30pm would be latest we could sit and that the table would have to be cleared by 9pm sharp.

Well as least they were straight, there's nothing worse than being told this half way through your main course.

INTIMATE

The minute someone mentions 'intimate' in regard to a restaurant I immediately think it's a politically correct way of saying 'cramped'. Thankfully this did not prove to be the case.

While the dining room is quite small, at least I didn't find myself putting my arm around the person at the next table every time I stretched out.

The large mirrors at the far end of the room, obviously, made the place seem bigger and allowed for the two massive male egos, growing larger due to gym membership, to admire themselves constantly.

Of the nine starters, the Thai Marinated Guinea Fowl (£4.95) and the Crispy Duck and Avocado with Oriental Greens (£4.95) stood out, so I can't understand why three of us went for Wild Atlantic mussels (£4.75) and one had Goats Cheese with pine nuts in a basil and cumin dressing (£5.50), which arrived before our maiden cigarettes were extinguished and all of which were superb.

Thirty two wines (one dessert) make up a fairly comprehensive list and I chose an Australian Chardonnay, Chateau Tahblik



('95, £16.95) and the Marques de Riscal Reserva Rioja ('96, £20.95), two favourites, but the latter an odd choice considering we all ordered seafood for our main courses.

The usual Irish suspects of pork, lamb, chicken and beef were all there, with reappearances from the starters of duck and guinea fowl, all ranging from £12.95 to £16.50.

The sauces and seasonings however had a somewhat international feel, peppered with chilli, pimento, ginger yoghurt, roasted red peppers and Cajun blackened.

Vegetarians were represented by a Gateaux of Mediterranean vegetables with polenta served with a sundried tomato cream.

But it was the five seafood specials that caught the eye, two of which were more expensive than the dearest on the regular

menu. All came served with potatoes and vegetables.

The fresh basil baked hake with courgette spaghetti in a tomato concasse and black olive dressing was the finest (£14.95). Flavoursome and plentiful, it didn't so much melt in the mouth as vaporise into a cloud of tastes, producing groans normally reserved for behind bedroom doors.

SPICY

The Spicy Thai Broth (hence the rioja) of lobster, crab claws and prawns reminded us all of a hot bouillabaisse, but was very tasty none-the-less. However, at £19.95, it could have done with a little more meat and a little less broth, particularly as the person who ordered it, like myself, is not afraid to eat.

The monkfish with spinach and garlic

Odells

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Open Tuesday to
Sunday 6pm, early bird
(£13.95) 6-7pm.

cream (£16.95) also had us all gushing with delight, but more for the sauce than the fish itself. This, we decided, was because the former was so good and not due to the latter being in anyway bad.

Some people say that Cajun Blackened Tuna Steak (£15.95) should not be served rare - I am not one of them. Apart from out of a tin, I want my tuna almost like it was prepared in a Tokyo sushi bar, not quite raw, but lightly seared no matter what seasoning it comes with.

I was therefore somewhat disappointed to find it quite well done. You can tell me as much as you want that it makes absolutely no difference to the taste when it's so heavily flavoured by the Cajun spices, but for me it's all about texture and dry is not a texture I'm particularly fond of.

However, the lemon and coriander butter and deep fried leeks almost made up for it.

The homemade ice cream of praline, chocolate cookie and lemon had the ladies giggling like schoolgirls, while the dessert of the day, Wild Berry and Apple Crumble was unbelievably good (both £3.95). The cheese board (£4.50) was a tad rubbery and too fresh for my liking.

The service was efficient and accommodating, but like a lot of restaurants today, we had to ask for water to be brought to our table.

Noting that it was pushing for 9.15pm, we asked if we could have some cocktails (we didn't have time to have them before the meal) and the bill in the small bar which was situated off the stairs half way up to the dining room.

Not au fait with Cosmopolitan Martinis, the waitress had no problem being coaxed on how to make them and even skipped out to the shop to get some cranberry juice to keep me happy.

Using seven shots of vodka and two Cointreau obviously pumped up the bill.

At £164 we felt we'd had good value for very good food, particularly when we thought that by 9pm we would be trying to fight our way into a pub when in fact that didn't happen until almost two hours later.

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