

Odells — I'll be back



Illustration: EORNA WALTON

THIS week I ventured to a restaurant which has been ploughing away successfully, and quietly, for some years. I speak of Odells in Sandycove, tucked away in a first floor premises over the bicycle shop, opposite Fitzgerald's pub.

We went through a discreet door and up the stairs, where there is a cosy bar area on the return, and continued up a few more stairs to be seated by a very pleasant girl at a table for two in a corner.

The colour scheme is brilliant flame and blue. There are bentwood chairs and a little water feature, with blue candle bowls and a Sweet William on each table.

It's a colourful spot, and the eclectic menu has Cajun leanings. I thought of a scene in a Bond movie set in New Orleans when I espied the jazz instruments adorning the walls — banjo, clarinet, bongo drums. The restaurant is small, which is rather nice because you can get sick of airport hangars.

Of 10 starters in the £3.50 to £6.50 range, so many appealed — lamb satay char-grilled with Thai peanut sauce; lamb's kidneys; seafood chowder with plenty of fresh fish; Thai chicken salad; Mexican bean galette with blue-cheese dip.

However, I couldn't resist the Louisiana fish cakes, £6.50, which were the best I have had in many a long day. I loved the hot, spicy undertone, but I could actually taste the fish in the two beautifully fresh specimens served on a sweet cucumber relish with a lemon and dill

mayonnaise, and chilli oil. The companion's choice of stuffed mushrooms, £4.95, didn't appeal because I had visions of the old bread-crumbed numbers, but, boy, was I wrong.

A half dozen or so good-sized mushrooms were laid in a line, skewer-style, and filled with cream cheese, sundried tomatoes and black olives, and sprinkled with a basil pesto. "Absolutely scrumptious," we declared of each other's starters.

Mainers, too, offered considerable and interesting choices at prices between £12.50 and £16.95, including vegetables of the day.

Guinea fowl is served with pears, cinnamon and bacon; fillet of pork is stuffed with creamy spinach and mozzarella, served with pink peppercorn and Madeira sauce.

Both the fresh baked salmon stuffed with ratatouille, served with black olives and basil dressing, and the roast duck with spiced apple, spring onion and calvados, appealed, but as I had returned from Normandy only that day I eventually chose roast monkfish, which was priced at £15.95.

Once upon a time, this fish used to be virtually thrown away; now it is so expensive you can hardly afford to buy it, but there was a considerable portion of pristine, fresh, superbly-cooked chunks in a little mound on my plate topped with buttered sesame, spring onions and set off with a garlic and ginger light soya sauce — just sublime. The companion's Cajun blackened fillet steak, £16.95, with a green peppercorn

sauce, was every bit as good, and cooked just as she requested. Spicy, interesting and tender, it was topped with pine-needle shreds of deep-fried potato.

We agreed the main events were so good the vegetables, a scooped-out soufflé baked potato and some little rondelles of carrot and courgette nicely buttered, were almost superfluous to the meal.

The companion indulged in a dollop of smashing home-made hazelnut meringue, £4.25, with lashings of cream and chocolate sauce. The wine list offered good value and a wide selection of very reasonably-priced wines.

Our bill, including a bottle of Concha Y Toro Casillero Del Diablo Merlot, £16.95, and the optional service, which was charming, came to £72.55.

Oh, dem Golden Slippers, Oh, dem Louisiana Fish-cakes. I'll be back.

● *Odells Restaurant, 49 Sandycove Road, Sandycove, Co Dublin. Tel: 2842188.*

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