

Publication: Hot Press
 Date: Monday, September 19, 2011
 Page: 128
 Extract: 1 of 1
 Circulation: 19.215
 Author:
 Headline: RESTAURANT OF THE FORTNIGHT



RESTAURANT OF THE FORTNIGHT

ANIAR

53 Lower Dominick Street, Galway Tel: 091 535947

The rumour is out that there is something special going on food-wise in Galway. Well, let us confirm here and now that it's true. And then some...

Aniar means 'from the west' and that is the underlying principle behind one of the most exciting new restaurant experiences on offer in Ireland right now. Aniar, which is owned and operated by JP McMahon and Drigín Gaffey, who created the highly successful Cava Spanish Restaurant and Tapas Bar in Galway, is a "terroir-based restaurant." In practice, this means that local produce is of the essence, with food foraging and other specialised activities being deployed in the sourcing of the ingredients - resulting in what chef Enda McEvoy calls "an ensemble of natural influences that give the food a sense of place." Based on the philosophy at Noma in Copenhagen, now widely regarded as the world's No. 1 restaurant, where McEvoy worked, it is a brilliant stratagem that gives Aniar's food a rare distinctiveness and originality.

There is a relatively short à la carte menu, which has five starters and

five main courses - all the better to ensure that the kitchen is focused on making what it does on a given night really great. The starters include delicacies like scallop, oyster, dillisk, wood sorrel and smoked potato, alongside more robust offerings like pigs' cheeks and belly, hazelnut, apple and pickled beetroot. They are all priced at €8.50, except the scallops (€10.50). Main courses include two meat and two fish options, as well as a vegetarian choice for €19.95. The simple descriptions hide a wealth of invention but even on the page they are both intriguing and mouth-watering: check wild brill, little gem, broad bean, carrot and clam or beef short ribs, onions, chickweed, sorrel and girolles.

We opted for the Tasting Menu, where four courses are served to the entire table. There are bonus dishes delivered along the way, including some wonderful freshly made bread, which kicks things off superbly. At €40 per person - or €60 with wine pairing (you get four generous glasses) - it is really excellent value for what is food of aspiring Michelin star quality.

When cooking is this good, it is

hard to pick highlights: every dish has its own unique qualities. But the scallops - as described above - were wonderful, the smoked potato adding a marvelously earthy touch to the lightness of the perfectly cooked mollusk. In contrast there was a brilliant richness about the beef short ribs, while the dish of pigs' cheeks and belly was far lighter than you'd have a right to expect, the hazelnut, apple and beetroot accompaniments emphasizing the Irishness of the offer. As you can imagine, each dish is its own mini-adventure as you work out the flavours delivered by the different ingredients and search through the lovely nuances in the counterpoints and harmonies created.

For desert, there was buttermilk pannacotta, plum, seabuckthorn and hazelnut confection, and again it was sublimely executed, the fruit providing the punch and flavor to highlight the wonderfully silky textures of the pannacotta. Buttermilk has never tasted so good!

A sweet wine and a brilliant double espresso finished off what was a superb meal. Make no mistake, Aniar is a bright new star on the Irish culinary scene. Check it out at the very first opportunity.

NIAL STOKES