

Giacco's

Frankie Jones

Blink and you'll miss it.

Giacco's, that is. The new independent neighbourhood wine and pasta bar tucked away on Blackstock Road. While a bit rough and ready, it's one of those roads you could easily spend a day exploring (start with Turkish eggs at Beam, splash your cash in the many second hand furniture shops, quench your thirst with an orange wine at Top Cuvee and – once you're nicely lubricated – gorge on a monstrous falafel wrap at Babaan's Naans).

But back to Giacco's. It certainly breaks the mould for Blackstock Road, bringing an understated touch of Italy to an otherwise almost exclusively Turkish parade of shops, bars and restaurants.

It's about two degrees in London when I venture out for some fuel in pasta form, and the windows of the restaurant are so steamed up I walk straight past it. When I find my way back, I'm met by a tiny, unpretentious space – all wooden tables, candles and plants – with just two other couples seated.



This isn't hugely surprising for an icy Wednesday evening in January (although the city's booming restaurant scene doesn't otherwise seem to have been blighted by booze-shunning, meat-evading, cost-cutting Londoners).

I take a seat at the back, near the kitchen and as far away from the draughty windows as humanly possible. While I wait for my friend, the waiter informs me that the menu changes daily (to my relief, he doesn't offer to explain the concept of "small plates") and that today's offering is scrawled on a blackboard behind the bar.

Burrata with roasted figs. Pancetta giovanna. The obligatory focaccia and EVOO (can you really claim to be a small plates place if really good bread doesn't feature on your menu?).

It's rare that I'm tempted by everything that flies out of the kitchen – usually there are a few duds; some thinly veiled attempts by the chef to use up leftovers in creative ways – but Giacco's has me hook, line and sinker.

After much deliberation, we start with bread, butter and cantabrian anchovies. The bread is dense and sweet, almost cake like. More importantly, it's absolutely perfect with the accompanying fatty anchovies and salty butter, both of which I spread liberally onto the bread (sorry, arteries). Then comes the puntarelle and artichoke salad, a plate piled high and wide with crunchy artichoke, crispy chicory and a dressing I'm going to need the recipe for.

When the mains arrive, we realise we might have overdone it. Giacco's definitely doesn't scrimp on portion size, but who's complaining?

Both pastas land around the £17 mark, so every bite is great value for money, really.

First up: green tagliatelle with clams and crusco pepper. Chewy, addictive nibbles of pasta with a rich, umami kick. Whoever made the pasta perhaps got a bit too acquainted with the salt shaker, but it works brilliantly alongside its sibling pasta dish: cocoa fettuccine with pork ragu and apple. Now, this one isn't a looker. In fact, I'd say the team could work on their presentation skills. As any chef knows, we eat with our eyes first. (And as any Instagram influencer will tell you, the camera always eats first). Luckily, what this pasta lacks in beauty it more than makes up for in flavour. But while delicious, it's the tiniest bit too sweet. Some exact mix of the two pastas would hit the mark for Goldilocks (if she were a carb connoisseur).

You're probably wondering about the wine. Glasses start at around £10, and bottles at the £42 mark, so it's certainly not cheap. But the waiters know their stuff and will happily offer you a taste to ease the decision making process. I opted for the Nino Barraco, a fruity white wine from Sicily that was so good I took a photo of the label so I could order it online.

Big portions, bold flavours.

Exactly what you want from your neighbourhood wine bar. I'd love to gatekeep this one, but that would be selfish. If (when) you decide to pay Giacco's a visit, remember: if in doubt, under order – you can always go back for more. And you very well might.

If you're wondering what's on the menu this week, you'll have to check their Instagram stories. I'd give the website a wide berth as both the dishes and the prices are out of date.