



Bigfish: unprepossessing outside, but a lively, clubby atmosphere inside

MENUWATCH

Bigfish



'Occasional table' takes on a new meaning at Bigfish, in Edinburgh's revitalised Leith docklands – it's an occasional restaurant which the owner opens every couple of weeks. However, the locals obviously feel it's worth the wait, as Victoria Heath discovered

paniments. Price says this can cause problems, as some fish are not suited to certain types of cooking. "But the only one we discourage is swordfish poached," he adds.

For blackening fish, Price uses a special butter mix containing paprika, cayenne pepper and a mixture of other herbs. He sprinkles this over the fish and cooks it in a very hot pan until it changes colour.

Price believes all fish blacken well, but prefers to chargrill swordfish and tuna. "They come in a nice steak form with a firm texture so they stand up well to that form of cooking," he says.

Price's favourite is poached monkfish with jasmine rice pilaf, chilli, tamarind and coconut broth. "The coconut milk is really good for poaching and brings out the flavour better than poaching in wine," he says. "You can then use the leftover broth as your sauce."

Fresh fish with a pan-Asian and Australian influence? Perhaps not what the old sailors of Leith would have been used to, but it's what the new residents are waiting for. ■

Bigfish, 14 Bonnington Road, Edinburgh. Tel: 0131-555 6655

Leith has changed. Once the preserve of sailors, the area is now being filled with housing, hotels and seashore-chic restaurants.

The docks were privatised in 1992, and since then restaurateurs have been fighting to gain a foothold in this new post-industrial marketplace. The newest addition to the scene is Bigfish, an occasional restaurant owned by James Robb, which opened in March.

How can a restaurant be occasional? Well, the action takes place in the Commissary, a multipurpose function space owned by Robb. When he and his head chef, Scott Price, aren't running the restaurant, they organise private parties, exhibitions and conferences there. Bigfish therefore opens roughly every fortnight, depending on other catering commitments.

As a result, a table at Bigfish is worth its weight in gold. "We're like an exclusive club; you've got to get in quick to get a table," says Price.

Although rather unprepossessing from the outside, Bigfish lives up to its name once you go inside. Fish swimming in a tank are projected on to a far wall and a glitter ball scatters light across the white linen-clad tables, which seat up to 45 diners. A clubby atmosphere emerges, with all guests given a glass of Prosecco on arrival and free mineral water available throughout the meal.

The menu changes every fortnight, depending on the catch and Price's

cooking. "It's going to be a long process, but we'll try eventually to use all Scottish fish," says Price. "Nearly all our fish now are from northern waters."

Australian-born Price trained for a year at Sally Clarke's restaurant in Kensington, London. Clarke is known for her clean, simple cooking and fresh produce, and Price admits her training influenced him. "Although the food I was doing at Sally Clarke's was quite different to what I'm doing now, I still want good seasonal produce, treated properly," he says.

Indeed, a year in the UK cannot erase a lifetime of South-east Asian-inspired cooking. Price's style of cooking contains many ideas from the Pacific Rim. "We're much closer to Asia down there and use a lot more of their concepts," he says.

An example of Price's Asian influences is his starter of seared scallops with roasted pork belly, which comes with a pineapple and mint salad. The rich, varying textures of the scallops and pork are balanced by thin slivers of pineapple with ripped-up mint leaves and baby salad leaves. Home-made chilli and lime dressing drizzled over the top completes the dish. "I try and stick with Thai principles, balancing the flavours and textures of fruit and herbs," he says.

Flexibility also defines Bigfish's menu. Diners pick one of five types of fish (usually monkfish, salmon, swordfish, halibut or tuna) and choose to have it chargrilled, poached, pan-fried or blackened with a variety of accom-

WHAT'S ON THE MENU

- Blood orange-marinated scallop ceviche with a salad of celeriac, cucumber and mint, £5.75
- Smoked loin of venison with roasted beetroots and shallots, red chard and horseradish cream, £5.25
- Smoked tuna carpaccio with crisp apple and purple cress salad, capers and vincotto, £5.75
- Seafood plate with rare-grilled lemon myrtle tuna, smoked wild salmon, crab and Loch Fyne oyster, £5.25
- Burnt chilli fish with tamarind, honey and lotus root, £10.95
- Pan-fried salmon with hand-cut chips, pea purée and chervil mayonnaise, £13.95
- Baked courgette flowers with ricotta, £10.95
- Rhubarb pavlova, £5.25
- Poached yellow peach with caramelised rice pudding, £5.25
- Strathdon Blue with quince and oatcakes, £5.95



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