

Taisteal – an exotic excursion based on Scotland's bountiful larder



Taisteal, situated in a prominent position in affluent Stockbridge and producing food which catches the eye and excites the taste buds

Speaking to Michelin-trained chef Gordon Craig about food is an experience and an education. Tasting what he produces is exiting and liberating.

He defies convention and introduces diners to a exotic and uplifting new world.

Who, for example, would place a rabbit – yes, rabbit – samosa in soup? That's just for starters.

To get a feel for the way the 32-year-old Glaswegian thinks about food you must visit Taisteal, one of Edinburgh's newest restaurants.

Competition is fierce in Scotland's capital as the recession bites deeper, and potential clients think twice about investing in a night out.

However, Gordon already has a strong CV buttressed by working in top restaurants including Leith's Plumed Horse and the much-decorated, Peat Inn, near St Andrews and working with the Roux Brothers in London.

His reputation was further enhanced by successfully establishing Field and Field Grill House, in Edinburgh's fashionable Stockbridge.

Taisteal – which means journey or to travel – is an apt name for the atmospheric and relaxing diner which sits in an enviable position as you stroll down from Princes Street.

Gordon loves to travel, not to seek out the sites and tick another box on his world list, but to seek out new ideas to introduce into his menu.

Pictures of his travels adorn the walls at Taisteal. Inspiration derived from those frequent visits to far off lands assault your senses.

He opened Taisteal in January after a fact-finding trip to China. His undoubted passion for food, and what you can do with it, shines through.

His research, built up over the years, has resulted in intricate dishes which stimulate and satisfy.

However, he is also fully aware of dietary considerations as those close to him have concerns in this sensitive area.. Stimulation is in the presentation. The pan fried scallops arrived and the colourful plate was like an art form

Delicate pastry sails were interspersed with pomegranate seeds and minute cubes of black pudding. The visual affect was stunning and the delicate taste of the perfectly-cooked fish was sharpened by the satay sauce. A triumph and I was later informed that this is one of his signature dishes.

Carrot soup with lemongrass plus rabbit spring roll had several diners around us looking quizzical when it was suggested. We had to have it.

The soup, cooked with coconut (good for those with lactose

intolerance) and a touch of ginger, had me itching to get home and look for a recipe. Simple ingredients given a cunning twist. Superb, and the product – a large bowl – arrived piping hot.

Little things mean a lot at the top end of the trade (the spiced-up, home-made popcorn taster to start was unexpected and enjoyed) and Gordon, supported by Daniel James, who have worked as a team for several years, go to great lengths with their on-plate detail.

That was exemplified once again in the main courses. Roast hake arrived on a warmed plate with new potatoes, curried cauliflower, mussels and golden raisins. The raisins provided a sharp edge to the superb dish, the fish flaking to the touch of the fork.

Maple and five spice Gressingham duck breast provided Gordon and Daniel with a platform to show their innovation.

The breast is slowly cooked in a water bath to retain moisture during the process. My knife slid through the meat which was beautifully red in colour, just the way I like it.

Grilled pak choi plus edamame beans, a preparation of immature soybeans in the pod found in the cuisine of China, Japan, Korea and Hawaii, an idea gleaned from his recent trip to the Far East, accompanied the spectacular dish. However, the Shitake samosa, which was a delight in itself, did not, for me, complement the dish because of the oily nature of the samosa.

Gordon's mission is to take elements of fine dining, backed by an extensive wine list and a selection of classic and contemporary cocktails, and present the package in a more relaxed environment.

Scotland's sumptuous larder provides a brilliant platform for him and his kitchen staff to show their creativity.

Front of house manager, Craig Brown, and our delightful waitress with a radiant smile, help produce an exceptional experience.

[Taisteal](#): open Tuesday to Sunday, lunch from 12pm to 2pm: dinner from 6pm to 9.30pm at 1 Raeburn Place, Edinburgh EH4 1HU: t: 0131 332 9977