

# Where to eat in Edinburgh – Brasserie Prince by Alain Roux at The Balmoral

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Isn't it grand when you walk into a space and think, "Ah! The memories..."? The Balmoral used to have a rather nice restaurant called Hadrian's on its North Bridge side. It was trying to be The Ivy in that you could get a posh burger or Eggs Benedict at 8pm, but there was something very 'hotel restaurant' about it. Not its fault, it was a hotel restaurant, after all.



My favourite thing about Hadrian's was that it had blinds that went half the way up the windows and in its heyday I was dating a guy who was both a bit of a lush and an owner of two glove puppets: Sooty and Donkey. After a boozy lunch or

whisky breakfast, one of our favourite pastimes was to give the diners of Hadrian's a little puppet show. Out the posh tourist cameras would come and swift the staff trotted to pull the blinds high and spoil everyone's fun. How amusing we thought ourselves to be...

Anyway, Hadrian's is no more. RIP, spoil sports. The new incarnation is the regally named Brasserie Prince By Alain Roux... Alain, in case you're wondering, is the son of Michel Roux OBE, the hotter of the Roux Brothers, who used to be on the telly for those old enough to remember.



Walking into Brasserie Prince's dining room I'm happy. It all looks so comfortable. I've dined in the best international restaurants, bistros, truck stops and ghastly New Town Dinner parties and one thing's for sure, the cost of dinner is not directly proportional to how comfortable your bottom will be whilst eating it. Why do restaurants or New Town types own 'Scandi Style' tables and

chairs. Fine dining whilst sitting on primary school furniture from Stockholm? I'll pass, thanks. But oh, baby! Prince is comfy... Soft, squidgy and I want to spend all night here.

We're ushered very pleasantly to our table by the Maitre' d who has possibly the most unusual accent I've ever heard. I'm convinced he's Finnish. Every restaurant has to represent a bit of Scandi, surely? Turns out he's from Scarborough. He's lovely and charming and suggests we start with a glass of champers. Full of good ideas, these seaside town boys!







The sommelier, who appears to be French (but could be from Blackpool for all I'd know), delivers the champers and puts down some tasty bread and French butter. He makes a point the butter is "French!", not some 'slightly salted' rubbish I buy from Lidl. He then, somewhat reluctantly, gets a ramekin and fills it with olive oil. "Greek" he informs us. And with an indulgent, 'Geniuses will have their quirks', shrug: "The olive grove owner is a dear friend of Monsieur Roux." I say to my companion, "Delightful olive oil but not quite as good as Andalucian." I used to live in Stockbridge, so like to think I have an experienced palate on these matters. Still it warms my heart that Alain is nice to his pals.

The butter though... By the udder of Marie Claire, or whatever dairy cow delivered that milk, it was heavenly.



Brasserie Prince has an open 'raw bar' where chefs in little booths carve various marinated seafood, charcuterie and oysters are regularly shucked. And when my oysters arrived, plump, ridiculously fresh and expertly freed from their

shells, ready for me to knock 'em down, I thought: I am in heaven right here. It was a hot night and I'd only have been happier if I'd worn my kaftan.

My dining companion had Scallop a la Parisienne and waxed lyrical about how fine and tasty they were. In fact she was more enthusiastic about her starter than her recent hair cut (short back and sides with a quiff, if you're wondering). I managed to pinch a taste and yes, yes, yes! Creamy sauce and juicy, lovely morsels of juicy, sweet little scallops. I'd have stolen more but it was all gone. The shorter the hair the faster the fork...



Mains swiftly follow. I have a half Lobster Thermidor with delightfully zingy sugar snap peas. The Lobster is perfectly cooked and seasoned, some chefs go too heavy on the dill but not here. I slightly regretted not ordering a side of chips though. Haircut has Veal en Blanquette and it's trad French comfort food. Melt in the mouth and really quite sublime.



The best part of the evening was meeting restaurant manager Hubert (silent T), who comes from the Loire Valley but now lives in Alloa. Yes really. Happily Hubert isn't a victim of a dodgy 1980s twin-towning scheme but simply loves the Ochil Hills. Hubert chose our wine and pretty much excelled himself. If I had one criticism it would be that the wine list has no tasting notes, which seems to be becoming 'a thing' in the fine dining world. However if you're not sure its best to ask and the friendliness of this restaurant is a good place to start.

The Chef's Vanilla Mille-Feuille seemed the perfect dessert for us, and here they wheel it out on a trolley with all the reverence of a state funeral. Executed by what appears to be a giant Samurai sword, it was a skilled balance of texture, with a silky perfectly sweet custard. You can't teach the French much about pastry.

Brasserie Prince is a great addition to the ever expanding Edinburgh restaurant scene. It has what you might call a reliable menu in that you could take a bunch of chums there and everyone would find something they really wanted to eat. It's my favourite kind of menu but it has to be terrifically cooked and there's no doubt that's the modus operandi here.

The staff are delightful and you absolutely get the vibe they want their diners to enjoy themselves. Its the sort of place you'd take someone completely out of your league on a high-end first date. And with the very French 'half way up the window' curtains I might even give Sooty and Donkey another outing next time.

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