

# Where to eat in Edinburgh – Restaurant Sonder

I had much to ponder on the way to Restaurant Sonder... mainly what does the name actually mean?

***A quick glance at the website tells me :***

***'Sonder is the realisation that each passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own'.***

I suddenly have an overwhelming sympathy for every fellow I pass. Can their life, thoughts, existence be as mundane and frustrating as mine? I certainly hope so and feel much cheerier.



Beef shortrib, walnut and burnt onion

However I am reminded of how the great and good are so often at pains to demonstrate their normality, which I find a bit much. Astronauts, for example are eager to let us Earthlubbers know how small and insignificant being in space makes you feel. If I were an astronaut I'd be so full of myself I'd be utterly insufferable. Of course all anyone wants to know is how you go to the lav in space which I suppose could be some inverse, perverse concept of Sonder. We like to remind ourselves our heroes are human.



## Agnolotti

The restaurateur Tricia McCrea awaits us. This is her first permanent venture having founded One Star House Party and travelled the world creating many pop up restaurants along the way, including one at Everest Base Camp (I resist asking how they provided lavatory facilities). Tricia is a fabulous hostess, bursting with enthusiasm and bonhomie. She elegantly twirls round the dining room making guests feel as though they are regulars even though it's their first time.



Sonder restaurant

It's refreshing to meet a restaurant owner who isn't a grumpy cretin whose missed their calling as a GP's receptionist. Along with head chef and OSHP travel companion Paul Graham they have created a monthly menu using seasonal ingredients.



Lamb neck, carrot and apricot

The interior is cool, muted and relaxed and with many comfy

booths to sit in I'm somewhat relieved that at least one Edinburgh Restaurant designer respects their customers bottoms. What really makes the dining area special is that the kitchen is in it. This gives warmth and atmosphere to the space and as I point out to my, fresh from a session with the hair clippers, dining companion, it will help out with the heating costs during the winter months. It's swiftly pointed out that's something my dad would say.



Kohlrabi, spinach, horseradish and apple

We begin with a couple of cocktails: named number "one' and 'two' on the list. "I did that so people don't have to worry about pronouncing them," trills Tricia. For me and Haircut that's often not a bad idea. I enjoy a champagne cocktail with Grand Marnier instead of brandy and Haircut has something resembling a Gimlet but with Prosecco.



Milk parfait with wildflower honey, puffed rice

Beautifully executed, they are, and as we've ordered a Black Olive Focaccia with Mascarpone, Olive Juice and Tapenade, we are very happy. The bread is served warm, the mascarpone and olive juice is creamy and tangy and the tapenade? Two words: it rocks. If I were going to Summerhall or The Queen's Hall for a gig, I'd pop in pre-boogie just to have this. It was excellent.

The Menu's divided into garden, sea and land and each dish is medium sized with the view to sharing two or three dishes each. We begin in the veg patch with with a Ricotta agnolotti, leeks, hazelnut and whey, accompanied by a dip in the ocean that is Crab, diakon, coriander and nage. Both are delicately cooked with due respect paid to the subtle flavours involved. Each has a fresh vibrance and the quality of the seasonal ingredients really stands out.

Back on dry land I'm eager for something a bit more meaty now. We opt for beef short rib, walnut and burnt onion along with lamb neck, carrot, apricot and yoghurt. Both dishes pack a fair old punch and accompanied by an excellent glass of Malbec we're feeling rather indulgent.

Dessert was a rather zingy berry sorbet and for fun we tried a blue cheese mouse with stewed figs and sorbet. I would have liked the cheese with a bit more sauce and the sorbet on the side, but hat's off for some originality when it comes to cheese course.

The wine list is not extensive but if you expect that in a new restaurant you don't deserve to leave the house never mind eat out.

What matters is if its well chosen and covers all the bases, which it does.

I wish Tricia the best of luck in her new venture. It's mighty brave to open at a time when chain restaurants are dominating the city centre and the restaurant business is one of high toil and tight margins. However although this is Tricia's first permanent venture I don't think it will be her last. The downstairs part of the venue is set to be a cocktail bar. No better place to philosophise on life's vivid complexity. Bring it on!

(snacks from £3 and medium dishes from £6-13)

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Trisha McCrae owner of Sonder

**How did the idea of your worldwide pop up restaurants come about?**

The idea came about whilst my husband, our friend and I were still working in London, we wanted to create a restaurant that was truly unique, we weren't ready to settle down yet and we all had a great sense for adventure. We decided to just go for it and see where we ended up. I don't think any of us imagined it lasting more than 2 years and taking us to the places that

it did.

### **What made you decide to open your business in Edinburgh?**

I have always wanted to open my own restaurant for a very long time, and after living and working in London for 6 years, along with travelling for 2 years with One Star House Party, I knew that my first restaurant had to be back home in Scotland.

For me the venue was the most important part of where I opened, as my dream was always to have the kitchen being the centre focus of the whole dining room, and when I came across this place as the Mexican it previously was I quite quickly started to envision what my restaurant could look like and everything unravelled quite quickly from there..

### **How do you and your chef create the menu?**

My favourite part of going to restaurants is tasting lots of different and exciting dishes, but with most restaurants it is pretty frowned upon to order 2 main courses, and with tapas you need at least 4 or 5 dishes and in one bite they are gone, or your dining partner beats you to it!

I wanted to come up with a menu concept that incorporated doing dishes that you were able to order 2 or 3 of them per person , but each dish stood by itself and was almost a meal in itself but without the carbs which left you open to having a second plate, we have very much angled the concept/ menu towards sharing so that as a couple you could enjoy 5 or 6 plates of different and exciting dishes and still have room for dessert..

Paul Graham who is Sonder's head chef is an incredibly talented and passionate chef, who creates dishes where every element of the plate and every ingredients used stands out in its own right, putting together an outstanding plate of food. We will change our menu every 6 weeks and the changes will be seasonally lead.

### **Do you have any future projects in mind?**

Our plan going forward is to open the bar downstairs for the end of this year as a boutique cocktail/ craft beer bar.

It will have its own separate entrance from the restaurant



with a little buzzer to gain entry.

Styling it with prohibition style decor, comfortable and relaxed seating with table service and possibly some vinyl decks playing in the back ground.

More travel is always on the cards too. We now have a great team at Sonder and I'd love to show them how it all began for us and take on new challenges in far off places.

**What restaurants in Edinburgh and beyond have inspired you?**

The places that have always inspired me are down to earth real restaurants where the people behind it live and breathe it every day. I've come across some really interesting places over the last few years from around the world. The more stripped back for me the better, the more you show of the people who are the creators of the restaurant, the more passion you expose. These types of restaurants bring out the best in the guests and create a relationship between the diner and the chefs that you don't see anywhere else.