

Chop House food was superb, but that's not the whole story

It took us nearly nine months to book a table at trendy Chop House in Edinburgh's historic Old Town because it is so busy. There are others in Bruntsfield and Leith, but we wanted this one for a number of reasons.

Reviews suggested it was one of THE places to eat in the Capital. Not cheap, but the food was exceptional. The web site also claimed that Market Street was "the perfect spot to enjoy the best steak in Edinburgh". It had to be tested.

Well, our steaks – British beef cooked over open-flame – were superb. We also had a choice of four sauces.

I normally don't take a sauce but, in the interests of research, my pick was stilton. The creamy sauce was sublime. My wife's chimichurri (generally chopped parsley, oregano, garlic, olive oil, vinegar and red pepper flakes) was, in my view, detrimental to the taste of the succulent steak.

The chunky chips had bags of flavour and my tomato and pickled onion salad side was ideal for my medium rare rib eye.

My wife loves macaroni and cheese. They serve a soft tasting cheese at Chop House which blended in perfectly with the mouth-watering, beautifully-cooked, sirloin. It had, she said, just enough grill taste to give an delicious edge to the juicy meat.

Around us, there were diners tucking into their choice and the place was buzzing. There is little in the way of decoration in the Market Street establishment.

Basically, the split-level restaurant and cocktail bar is set in a C-listed brickwork arch with largely bare stone walls, slim, black steelwork and ducting above your head.

There is, however, a padded, red backboard covering one side of the restaurant wall. Chop House can accommodate roughly 30.

Our seat was at the top of the steel staircase. The position gave some privacy as other tables seemed, to me, close together.

Customers rightly expect high standards here. We did and the service and one nano-second in particular comes to mind when we relate the overall experience.

We were early but checked in with front-of-house. The one staff member said we could wait in the bar.

He then then turned to another customer and dealt with his bill. We did not receive an offer of drinks until he was reminded by a female waiter that we did not have any.

The bar area has high bar stools, comfortable to a point. There are booths along one wall and we decanted. The booths were difficult to get into, almost impossible, I would suggest, for anybody with real back or leg problems.

I popped to the loo. There are four cubicles – two male and two female – and the one I visited was messy, with a soggy chunk of toilet paper in one corner near the back of the WC. It was still there when I visited over 60 minutes later.

Back to the barman/cocktail maker/pineapple cutter and oyster server who admitted to be “dying” with the cold.

My wife – who has a medical background – and I then saw him

cough into both hands and, without appearing to wash or squish gel over them, he went back to preparing cocktails, serving drinks and oysters and delivering crusty bread to tables.

One other thing. We ordered the crusty bread to go with our drinks as we waited for the main course.

The bread arrived with butter in a rounded, steel holder. Neat. The butter appeared to be a whiff of pesto and proved difficult to remove from the receptacle and spread on the bread. It flaked to the knife like Play-Doh and did not add, in my view, to the crusty bread.

I asked for balsamic and olive oil instead. Sorry sir, we don't have that. Then I requested ordinary butter but was initially told they didn't have any. As I finished the dry bread, which was good by the way, the butter appeared.

The culinary expertise is certainly in-house but must be matched by slick service and high standards front-of-house. Possibly they were under pressure and had an off-night.

Catering, in my view, is teamwork to produce the right product. We were disappointed and I've upped my vitamin C intake, just in case I pick up any bugs.