

Five-star ambitions for The Scholar

Delicate viola petals decorated the delectable lemon curd tart which melted in the mouth. This was just one example of the attention to detail shown by executive chef Ed Fortune at The Brasserie at The Scholar.

It was one of many which made this opening event stand out. Yes, it was an opening event and naturally all the stops were pulled out to make it work, but, this hotel, situated in the heart of the Pollock Estate student complex in the shadow of Arthur's Seat, an ancient volcano of 251m, has all the makings of a real gem.

It is four-star currently but Gavin MacLennan, the group general manager, has every intention to raise a five-star banner here in the longer-term.

Currently, Fortune's attention to detail will be a critical plant in this ambitious move. His tasting menu majored on local produce, but this classic British menu had subtle modern twists.

For example, the pumpkin soup starter was lifted by ricotta cheese, basil and a hint of chilli. Smoked duck was laced with Stornoway black pudding, celeriac and apple, and the mackerel ceviche was flavoured by beetroot, radish and five-spice kale.

Moving on, the sweet lamb rump, sourced from The Borders, boasted maple bacon, green beans with a pleasing crunch, miso neeps, the humble turnip given a surprising and pleasing boost, plus tarragon jus.

Scottish salmon, Ed makes no apology about using farmed salmon, arrived with fondant sweet potato, spiced ratatouille and black olive.

Adjacent was roast cauliflower with spring onion, cavolo nero and orange accompanied by a caper and raisin vinaigrette. The sharpness of caper blending with sweetness of the raisin.

Tempted? Well there is more. The trio of desserts boasted dark chocolate shortbread, salted caramel mousse, plum and topped with sea salt popcorn, a surprising wee twist.

Red wine poached pear with truffle mascarpone and an almond feuilletine was also prominent, but the lemon curd tart with torched meringue featured pastry which crumbled pleasingly to the touch. Raspberries added a touch of sharpness to the luscious creamy filling.

Of course, that is where we came in. I missed out on the cheese course because of my lactose intolerance, but fellow diners were impressed with the selection of Scottish cheese which was paired with gin from Pickering's.

A strange combination, perhaps, but Marina from Pickering's, based at Summerhall in Edinburgh, waxed lyrical about mixing a gin and tonic with locally-produced cheese. Must try it.

Elrick Log (goat's milk), thyme, honey, Lanark White (Ewe's milk) and Connage gouda (cow's milk) was on offer. I was driving so the gin was also off limits. Others indulged.

There is, however, so much more to The Scholar than the food. It has 72-rooms. It is part of a collection run by The University of Edinburgh which also includes The Scott Hotel, a

37-room, luxury hotel adjacent to The Scholar and situated in an 18th century baronial house. There are other hotel options as well as apartments.

Accommodation rates, he said, are competitive and all profits from the restaurant and accommodation – there are a total of over 200 rooms available – is ploughed back into the university.

Edinburgh, for the record, is rated one of the world's top seats of learning, consistently ranked in the world top 50 and placed at No 22 in the 2024 QS World University Rankings.

Gavin stressed that the accommodation at The Scholar is geared to everyone, not just parents of students, and he added: "The majority of our business is tourism, visitors from America, Australia, Japan, Europe (UK, Germany and France).

"Middle East business comes here as well and China is now opening up again, and we also enjoy corporate guests from local businesses around here.

"The smaller part of our business is probably the family of students who come for a short period of time, but we have a great location as we are only half-a-mile from the Royal Mile."

The Scholar, he stressed, is open to everybody and The Brasserie is an all-day dining facility (noon to 9pm) and there is a bar, described in the publicity blurb as "laid-back", which serves "crafted" cocktails by bar manager, Emelise Vassallo.

The Scott Hotel is re-opening on Monday and the boss said: "My mission here is to expand the hotel accommodation offering but also to expand the food and beverage offering.

He added: "We are extremely competitive and we are very aware of our location. We are a little way out of the city centre,

but we are surrounded by parkland including Arthur's Seat, and we also have access to the university gym at The Pleasance. We offer value for money.

"This is a four-star hotel and I have run five-star all my life. That is my mission to be the best we can be. We have amazing plans and luxury is in my blood and I am determined to make that happen here."

Booking can be made direct or through central reservations on +44 (0) 131 651 2189 or reservations@ed.ac.uk or recognised agents including Expedia and Booking.com

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PICTURES: Reception at The Scholar. Picture by ***Nigel Duncan***



DINING AT THE SCHOLAR: Staff preparing for a corporate event. Picture ***Nigel Duncan***