

Sotto is new Italian hotspot in thriving Stockaree

The squad of enthusiastic waiting staff greeting us as we entered Sotto, the new Italian restaurant in Stockbridge, had me wondering if someone had mucked up the staff rota.

But as the downstairs dining room (Sotto means *under* in Italian) filled up, it soon became apparent that those-in-the-know had latched on to the excellent three course lunch offering fixed at only £23 (£19 for two courses).

It brought back happy memories of the excellent fixed lunch hotspots of old to be found around Edinburgh when I was on the tools proper and wining and dining (ok more wining) police contacts – while the modern Italiano/Scozzese menu transported me back to a four week sojourn around southern Italy in the summer.

Launched by sommelier James Clark and Calabrian chef Francesco Ascrizzi in what was the former legendary Ping On restaurant, the Deanhaugh Street enoteca (wine bar) on the ground floor seats 25 and will showcase some 200 Italian wines, while the comfortably decked out downstairs trattoria can accommodate 36, with a private dining room for up to eight guests.

Clark honed his craft at The Palmerston and East End Cellars before his general manager post at Divino Enoteca in Merchant Street, where Ascrizzi was head chef following spells at Mono and Tipo.

Sotto's menu has plenty of nods to Italy's 20 distinctive regions which jealously guard their local cuisine and traditions, and lunch started well with excellent complimentary focaccia accompanied by a delicious red burst of Pesto alla Trapanese from western Sicily.



Bresaolo



Sotto in Stockbridge



Agnello – lamb shoulder

We passed on the butternut squash soup with pumpkin seeds and sage, instead going for Bresaola – air dried salted beef traditionally served in the Lombardy region, shavings of Parmigiano Reggiano, an excellent balsamic and pane carasua – a Sardinian flatbread favoured by shepherds who were often away from home for months and needed portable and durable sustenance.

Mains included that classic Roman staple Cacio e Pepe using Spaghetti alla Chitarra – a pasta from Abruzzo – but we both opted for Agnello – a nicely executed little parcel of lamb shoulder with a tasty red wine jus and melt-in-the-mouth crushed new potatoes. Both hit the mark but I would happily have paid a few more quid for a splash of green on the menu and the option of ordering seasonal verdure.

Dolce options were short and sweet – a choice of gelato in

three flavours including pistachio and vanilla but it was chocolate and rum for me, winning over the Amalfi Lemon Granita.

Wines come in 125ml or half litre options ranging in price from £7-£12 a glass and starting at £24 for 500ml, stretching up to £48 for a Nebbiolo from Langhe in Piemonte. We settled for a very quaffable light bodied Frappato, lighter and fresher than Sicily's better known and bolder Nero D'Avolo reds.





James Clark and Francesco Ascrizzi



The staff were knowledgeable and generous when asked for advice or information about what we were eating and drinking

and I look forward to returning to Sotto to try the more extensive dinner menu.

It would be pushing it to call it a gripe, but given service is a strong point at Sotto, I was surprised not to be relieved of my raincoat when I arrived and so it was parked beside me on a seat, while other diners had jackets draped over chairs.

Stockbridge seems to be on the up at the moment judging by a raft of new restaurant openings in recent months and the main Raeburn Place thoroughfare was bustling and lively on a Thursday afternoon. I can see Sotto carving a place in the affections of locals and visitors alike and hopefully it will have as long an innings as the Ping On enjoyed.

Sotto, 28 Deanhaugh Street, Edinburgh, telephone 0131 332 3261

To book info@sottoedinburgh.com

The enoteca is open for coffee, wine, drinks and snacks from 10am to midnight Wednesday to Sunday.

The trattoria is open for lunch and dinner, Wednesday to Sunday noon-2.30pm and 5-10pm (7.30pm Sunday).

Website: www.sottoedinburgh.com

