



REVIEW CATHERINE CLEARY

A road trip through taste

Heron and Grey in Blackrock are serving the most creative food in the country



We are drowning in food knowledge. The averagely interested diner knows as much as most chefs did a generation ago. We nod sagely as the waiter points to the foraged lickspittle leaf or fermented seeds of an early flowering gopnik (yep, just made both those up). And then whip out our phones and google it all when he's gone.

Umami sounds like something you might wail having Germolene dabbed on a skinned knee. Now the word to describe meaty flavour is part of the lexicon of fluent foodie. The trick is winnowing the real from the weapons-grade spoof, and asking whether all this information makes dinner more delicious?

Andrew Heron and Damien Grey are fanatical about flavour. A meal at their tiny Michelin-starred restaurant in Blackrock Market is a road trip through salt, sweet, sour, bitter and umami. Each taste along the way is mapped as a dot on a page. (This is not a metaphor. They really do this, with pen and paper.) The aim is for a zig zag, never a straight line. Dinner comes with the "why" explained like a tailor showing you the intricate shoulder seams before you slip the jacket on.

Sounds exhausting. And in less deft hands it would be.

Front of house man Heron delivers the details in short rapid-fire bursts, like in-person tweets. Chef Grey also works the floor – they are part-story tellers, part odd-couple act. "He likes a few foams," Heron swipes at one point.

"You like talking," Grey lobs back.

Three snacks as foreplay for your tasting muscles. One's a strip of Fermagh black bacon so fudgy it could have been confited sitting on top of fried capers and tiny cubes of cured pineapple, all smoke and sweet and gammon and pineapple memories of a 1970s childhood. Then a pasta star the size of a poker chip filled with Parmesan and cream and then drowned in a foam, with a smidgeon of black garlic at the bottom. Bite down and three years of cheese-aging reverses in a rush of liquid, an echo of Ferran Adria's spherified olive only better because it's silken pasta and groan-worthy cheese. We're on the third opener before we notice there's been no

9.5/10

Name and Address,

Heron and Grey, 19A Main Street, Blackrock, Co Dublin (01) 212 3676

Music: Nice

Food provenance: Extensive, producers, farmers and suppliers all name checked

Facilities: They finally have a proper one, after colonising a next door unit.

Wheelchair access: Yes

Vegetarian options: I'm guessing great. But must be requested in advance

THE VERDICT: Properly awesome food, with jokes.

bread. They've phased it out. "We want you to go home feeling better," Heron explains.

Puzzling the details of what your mouth is telling you feels like stepping into technicolour eating. The deliciousness is in the detail like trying to detect the pine needle oil in the last snack, a mouthful of smoked mackerel in a foam with roe.

Then a hay-smoked tempura oyster. Sea lettuce turned to jade-green glass balances on top of a blast of freshness. Hours of work have created a beach in a bowl. Next butternut squash, all of it nose-to-tail style or skin to seed. The skin has been pulped and marinated in sherry vinegar.

There are compressed strips of flesh that eat like fruit jelly, a vanilla-laced set custard in the middle and some tart sorrel leaves to tease it back off the desert trolley.

Back to base notes with Crozier Blue cheese burned to a bitter caramel and covered in sweet broccoli with the stems pureed with lilac and chive flowers.

Then a chardonnay vinegar foam to wipe the palate clean comes with liquorice, apple and fennel to soften its sting. The "main" of the night is halibut fillet glazed with a toffee bone broth served on waste greens; the cabbage leaves, bolted beet tops, broccoli leaves, are compost made delicious.

The show stopper is a "cheese plate" of a layered square topped with a piped cream of the gentle Slieve Bloom from Ralph Haslam's Mossfield organic farm. Underneath there's crisp cheese,

marinated Hen of the Woods mushrooms, slivers of grapes, a mushroom puree and watercress tarragon and shallot. It is the best cheese plate I've ever eaten.

Sheeps milk yoghurt with a macadamia nut meringue with an apricot semifreddo (which could do with a bit of a warm-up) comes and then the chocolate finale which I've run out of space to describe, much less the gorgeous non-alcoholic drinks matched with each of my courses. "This is the end, by the way," Heron says delivering the chocolate. "There's no more messing. We always finish on chocolate."

The tasting menu (without drinks) costs just over €70 a head including service. They're booked up for the rest of the year.

We're here for a fundraiser for chef Roisin Gillen who's heading off on an unpaid internship at Alinea in Chicago. She's been part of the team since they arrived and is a chef with a stellar future ahead.

Information and superlatives overload the food world. When eggs on toast can be called awesome how do you describe what's happening here? Heron and Grey have ripped up the tasting menu and origami'd it into the most creative food in the country. This is two-star eating in a dickied-up lean-to in a ramshackle market. Join the waiting list or mark November 1st in your diary when online bookings open for the first three months of next year.

Dinner for two with matching drinks came to €220