

Food & Drink Eating Out



Looking to the future: The impressive City Café in Leeds offers understated glamour and some excellent food

An exercise in elegance

We felt rather like film stars as we were escorted along the carpet on

the approach to the newly built City Inn on Granary Wharf. Despite my having a glorious bouquet in my arms, it wasn't to do with our innate glamour, but because the place was still something of a building site. Nonetheless, it set the tone for an evening characterised by a pleasing elegance.

City Inn has sister hotels in Manchester, Glasgow, Bristol, Birmingham and London, and the new Leeds branch looks very much as if its design was conceived in the boom years prior to the recession. The reception area features wide open space, minimal furniture with elongated lines, and an emphasis on stylish use of industrial materials. It's accidentally retro, and already redolent of nostalgia for the not-too-distant past when Leeds seemed to be awash with new money.

After being welcomed with such charming courtesy, we were ushered into City Café, the spacious dining area, and presented with menus and a wine list. My flowers were graciously provided with a vase, which is

Restaurant Review City Café At City Inn ★★★★★

precisely the kind of touch that elevates the eating out experience above the everyday. Several varieties of rosé, which was what we wanted, were available and, thanks to the advice of the well-informed and beautifully mannered sommelier, we were pleased with our City Café Rosé Bernard Coste, a light, salmon-shaded wine from the Languedoc that was just right at the end of a sunny day (£4.25 medium glass, £14.95 bottle).

It was a good accompaniment to our starters, which were also well-suited to the time of year. My friend's City Café prawn cocktail (£6.95) looked like a fishy version of a Knickerbocker Glory, layered with avocado and tomato salsa, and topped with a tempura king prawn. It was good, but bettered by my fresh crab spring rolls (£5.95): crisp, perfectly flavoured examples of contemporary fusion cooking that looked as pretty as a picture with their accompanying spring onion and chilli and mango salsa.

The starters were a good introduction to City Café's sleek modern British food with its notes of global influence, and the mains followed through with flair. Pea, broad bean and Dolcelatte risotto

(£9.95), a chic take on classic Italian food, was a pretty shade of pale green and had a lovely, creamy texture. It boasted gentle but rounded flavours given sparkle by a hint of mint. The bistro classic of fishcakes was given a splendid makeover as a finnan haddock and salmon version (£11.50); it was mostly fish, and all the better for it.

We were a little taken aback by our side dishes: they were very good, but very small. £3.50 is a lot for six chips, no matter how well cooked and, likewise, £2.95 seems steep for steamed broccoli with chilli on top.

Puddings – a scrumptious banana and hazelnut Arctic roll with passion fruit and a sophisticated rhubarb and ginger crème brûlée (each £5) – restored our faith in City Café. A trip up to the stylish Sky lounge on the 13th floor boosted it even further. The panoramic views of Leeds are spectacular, and as we looked out at the handsome buildings that represent its industrial past, and the hopeful symbols of its present, we hoped very much that City Inn would have a part to play in its future. *Tina Jackson*

■ A meal for two with drinks costs about £65.

City Inn, Granary Wharf Approach, Neville Street, Leeds, Mon to Fri noon to 2pm, Sat and Sun 1pm to 3pm, dinner daily 5.30pm to 10pm. Tel: 0113 241 1039. www.cityinn.com

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