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→ Sun and shellfish



Posted: March 24, 2011 in Uncategorized

What better way to enjoy a sunny lunchbreak than with shellfish.

Today I popped down to Bar 8 and checked out their new lunchtime menu. It's nice and simple. One fish, one meat, one salad, soup, chowder and a few other bits.

I had steamed clams and mussels with chorizo and homebaked bread. The perfect diversion from the usual salad.

Sitting in the window with the sun in your eyes watching the world go by and eating the freshest Atlantic shellfish is what lunchtimes should be about. Away from the hustle of Shop Street/Quay Steet, and smashing value at €9.



Check it out.

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→ Wild garlic has arrived

Posted: March 16, 2011 in Uncategorized

The best way to start Spring is by picking a nice big bag of wild garlic and making soup

I went down to the woods and picked some of the early wild garlic leaves at the week wild garlic pesto. At this time of the year the leaves are uber fresh and pungent.

It's as simple as whizzing up the leaves, adding pine nuts, olive oil, Parmesan, and if it's too strong throw in a bag of baby spinach. It is the best snack to have in the fridge right now.

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[Cooking up the weekends finds](#)



Posted: March 8, 2011 in [Uncategorized](#)

Our trip to Mayo this weekend was.....well, surprising to say the least. I picked up some smashing produce along the way including basil pesto from Cafe Rua.

Now when it comes to pesto there are lots of okay pestos in delis and restaurants, many too salty, few are incredibly fresh, and I always struggled to find one comparable to that of homemade pesto. I presume that is because the cost of making full on pesto with Parmesan and pine nuts is prohibitive in terms of costs for most food producers. However, not to skimp on quality Cafe Rua have matched my homemade pesto using only the traditional ingredients, and resulting in a fresh and pungent basil pesto. YUM, score again for Rua!!

Another item I picked up in the deli at Rua was an imported cooking chorizo from Sheridans in Galway, which turned out to be most awesome. It was fascinating to cook as it release all the oils from inside the sausage to turn your frying pan into a liquid gold vat of Spanish flavour.

On to Newport and I bagged some of Dominick Kellys award winning black pudding. It is a traditional pudding with a smaller white pudding running through it. The nicest pudding I have ever had!! It is the best of both worlds, top class black and white in harmony together. Michael Jackson would have love it!!



With the weekends goodies I set to work. I adorned Kelly's incredible pudding with some luscious North Atlantic scallops from Alis fish shop in Barna, complimented by Sheridans spicy chorizo with puy lentils, beef tomatoes, and a mild mustard vinagarette.YUM YUM YUM



Finding culinary jewels and cooking them up after your adventure is akin to a day of fishing and bringing home one skinny makeral, PURE HEAVEN!!

I am planning to revisit a most interesting experience from a few years ago in the coming week. The day of the pigs head for Christmas dinner is long gone, but the flavours are some to need to be revived.

Three years ago I set about making a traditional brawn, one of the most disgusting yet satisfying culinary experiments I have witnessed. A pigs head is about as close to a human head as it gets, and they probably don't taste too dissimilar.

Keep an eye out for my pictorial on producing a yummy and incredibly thrifty meal.....

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Unexpected cafe culture in Castlebar

Posted: March 6, 2011 in [Uncategorized](#)





I have visited Castlebar only a few times in my life, and never by choice. I don't mean to knock the Mayo town, but I have never heard anything good about the place that would encourage me to get into my car and drive up there, until recently.

Rave reviews from a couple of tuned in people indicated that there was indeed a reason to visit Castlebar - a smashing cafe and deli called Cafe Rua, and to add to it this weeks Nationwide exclusively covered food in Mayo, another undiscovered truth for many.

Cafe Rua was not mentioned in the program as it focused on the award winning black pudding of Dominick Kellys over in Newport(which I will cover in a future blog), and the artisan food producers of Westport. This got me thinking that I had to check out why people had begun talking so highly of the food industry in Mayo.

As you approach Castlebar from Galway you will find Cafe Rua on your right, just before you hit the town square. The hungry and inviting red facade of the building draws curiosity immediately, like that of a water fountain in the desert.

The ground floor of the cafe/deli is what a proper deli should be, plenty of local produce, beautiful homemade in-house pesto, jams, salad dressings, vinagarettes, breads, cakes etc you name it and they have it covered. The traditional butchers floor really made me smile, indicating that these guys love what they do, and take pride in bringing pedigree to the food world of Castlebar.



Upstairs is a busy cafe, homemade cakes, breads, and the days menu displayed on a blackboard – the menu is for children – I'm not sure if it changes completely everyday, but if it does, hats off to the chefs!!



The menu is not exactly life-changing or cutting edge, and I have to say I was disappointed after hearing so many wonderful things. BUT, all was not lost.

I ordered a steak sandwich, which turned out to be the most awesome steak sandwich I have ever had. Tender minute steak adorned a hunk of freshly baked bread, the most amazing homemade coleslaw with celery and mustard seeds, roast potatoes, and fresh salad, pickled cucumbers, and watercress. Everything on my plate was incredibly good quality, and most appetising. Presentation also got top marks as my disappointment at the menu changed immediately when I saw my luscious plate.



Not being impressed with the menu either Lorna settled on bacon and potato croquettes, which turned out to be very nice homemade quality croquettes, not the usual dissappointing breaded rubbish synonymous with greasy finger food style croquettes.



For me the greatest touch was not only a fab kids menu, but the fact that the guys at Rua are thoughtful enough to have a daily kids special, which comes with a peanut cookie. River had penne bolonaise with garlic bread – a dish I would have been delighted with myself.



Service was OK, the cafe was full from when we arrived until we left. Friendly, but slightly disorganised, I used my trick of getting River to remind the girls he was thirsty after we had asked 3/4 times. The cafe itself was bright airy, and laid back, perhaps it's wrong to question the level of service on a busy Saturday lunchtime, but impressions last, luckily the food was good enough to excuse the service.

Much to Rivers dissapointment the cookie which came with the kids special had just run, but to his advantage they offered any cake he wanted in exchange(a much better deal!!) Instead he choose a 'cookie cake', which was best described as a smashing modern Bakewell, loaded with moist almond flavour, and topped with stewed plums – YUM. I kindly helped him finish it off!!



Finally Lorna had her favourite, a traditional Italian style chocolate brownie with homemade icecream, and there were no complaints but an empty plate within seconds.



I have to take my hat off to the guys at Cafe Rua, they are doing a great thing for food in Castlebar, the menu represents what people in the town are looking for, but Rua style.

Food is presented in an uncomplicated fashion, disguising exemplary, high quality cuisine. It's not adventurous, and it's far from pretentious, it is simply smashing cafe food, Irish style – feeding the people what they want, Rua style.

And what is Rua style? Rua is high quality, locally sourced, lovingly prepared, thoughtful, beautiful, and creative.

Rua is ahead of its game in terms of local and Irish produce. It presents an extensive range of its own produce through the cafe and deli, as well as supporting other small and artisan producers both in Mayo, and throughout the country.

Is it worth driving to Castlebar just for lunch? I can honestly say that as there is NOTHING else to do in Castlebar, make it part of an adventure. Rua took us to Newport to get some of Kellys black pudding, and then on to Westport to check more cafes and restaurants, and that is a great way to spend a lazy Saturday!!

Cafe Rua ta an bia go hailainn.....

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Above the bar



Posted: March 4, 2011 in [Uncategorized](#)

I don't do pub grub unless I'm roped into it by one of the world's many gastro ignoramas. However between cafes and pubs there seems to be a new breed making a sustained effort at better quality, and tasty foods.

Whereas Sam Baileys holds its place in the boring world of cafe food, the same has to be said about the Townhouse.

The food is certainly not cutting edge, but what they do is streets ahead of the rubbish bar food that publicans have been tormenting the country with since the start of the Tiger, when a pub could no longer be happy with just serving booze.

What has become one of my many routines is Fridays three amigos lunch; lasagne and chips with River and dad at the Townhouse.

Rivers favourite meal is lasagne and Fridays at the Townhouse come second best to Daddy's bolonaise.

The Townhouse signature is crispy rough cut chips. Something so simple yet impossible to find!!

The lasagne is rich, creamy, and slightly authentic, but the sauce is a bit sweet. The trade off with this dish is that it's a super pub dish, not a lasagne from an Italian restaurant.

To contrast the chips the dish comes with a fresh green crunchy salad of mixed leaves, a selection good enough for any top restaurant.

There is a casual evening restaurant that seems to mirror the afternoon menu – High quality pub food.

It is an excellent place to go for an evening where the beers and atmosphere are more important than food, but you still want good grub.



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[Smashing salads @ Sam Baileys](#)



Posted: March 3, 2011 in [Uncategorized](#)

Sam Baileys on Eglinton Street started out as a full on New York style deli. It took a while to find itself, and over time I have really warmed to it's simple affordable and fresh offerings.

If there's any one thing I could sat about the place it has to be that everything is incredibly fresh, and there is no doubt that food is made to order.

There is always a great soup on the menu, and tasty sambos, salads, and daily specials.

With the smashing weather we are experiencing today I choose a refreshing salad of Duck confit and pomegranate.

The salad came with crispy baby cos, and vine tomatoes. It was an excellent summer choice, however the generic salad dressing let it down slightly.

It wouldn't put me off returning to Sam Baileys as the guys in there pride themselves on consistently good lunches. It's the freshness, quality, and originality that separates them from the rest of lunch houses in town, and for affordable

cafe lunch Sam Baileys is an excellent choice.



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[Perfect pizza in Gort's Gallery](#)



Posted: March 1, 2011 in [Uncategorized](#)

Gastronomic delights and the town of Gort do not sound like a match made in heaven however there is a curious cafe on the towns square that has been turning out smashing food to the local catchment of crusties and ex pats for some years now.

Anyone on a trip to Coole Park must divert to the Gallery Cafe on Gorts town square for takeaway coffees and cakes, or pop in to refuel after an afternoon chasing children through the forest.

The place itself is laid back, casual and adopts the typical modern, arty, who cares(in a loving way), feel to the place. I believe they call it retro chic. Art exhibitions, and poetry evenings held regularly.

Food is most definitely lovingly prepared with fresh ingredients and a thoughtful selection of vegetarian and meat pizzas, sambos, and salads.

I had an incredible pizza with blue cheese, pine nuts, pear, red onions, and Parma ham. There is an option for a spelt base at an extra €2, but I thought I'd give the traditional stuff a chance and save my healthy eating for later.

The pizza was delicious; authentic, flavoursome, and with a perfect thin crispy base. Tasty toppings were the highlight, with a non stodgy base to present. And cooked in a pizza oven!! No shortcuts taken in Gort!!apart from the bypass that is!!

I'm not really a cake man. But this is the kind of place that I become a cake man, as I know it's all good.

I had a typical Italian style brownie, moist, chocolatey, and nice crunchy walnuts running through it. Pure delightful!!
The perfect brownie 10/10

Only joy is to be had from the road less travelled, nevermind that aul bypass.



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