

The Ambassador in London's Exmouth Market

16 May 2006 by JR

The Ambassador, which opened just before Easter, on busy Exmouth Market opposite the long established but still exciting **Moro** restaurant and Spanish food specialist Brindisa's shop, is another restaurant I would add to the trio I wrote about some time ago – [Vinoteca](#), [Wright's Oyster Bar and Canteen](#) – where fun is as much a part of the attraction as the good food and the attractively priced wine list.

Run with a deft touch by Clive Greenhalgh, who used to work for Adam Robinson at **The Brackenbury** who in turn worked for me in the 1980s (and just to keep this connection going Robinson is a long- distance shareholder in The Ambassador although he is now living on a 400- acre farm in South Africa), The Ambassador is a combination of effective simple features: an open kitchen at the rear; a long bar to which, although happily for not that much longer, smokers repair in between courses; and simple but comfortable wooden chairs and formica- tipped tables.

While one consequence of this approach is pretty keen prices, another is quite a high noise level once the restaurant is full, particularly if the table next to you happens to be occupied by a couple of rather loud doctors as it was on the night we ate there.

But everything we ate there was impressive. We began with a couple of starters, a foie gras and chicken terrine and a foaming bowl of nettle soup (definitely not a cappuccino) and shared one of their bar plates, two round slices of a ham hock terrine studded with carrots along with a couple of glasses of white wine, a very youthful **Sepp Grüner Veltliner 2005** and a zesty **Dom de Perreau 2005 Montravel**, both of which were poured from full, just opened, bottles at the table.

Any thought that this was going to be a cheap date was scuppered by my wife spotting on the wine list **Il Marroneto 1996 Brunello di Montalcino** for £38 which, as the new crop of Brunello 2001s is the subject of a forthcoming article, she decided was vital 'for research purposes'. It worked just as well on the pleasure principle too; its vibrancy and beautiful balance, despite a less than glorious vintage, noticeable even to a restaurant correspondent.

While the menu comprises some pretty substantial dishes such as poached halibut with hispi cabbage and Alsace bacon (£17.50); Haughley farm chicken breast, mousserons and wild garlic (£14) and braised breast of veal with sweetbreads, pumpkin and olives (£14.50), we settled on a macaroni and red pepper gratin with fontina (£9.50) and a starter portion of squid and pig's cheek casserole (£6.50) which was as hearty and filling as it read.

As impressive as the cooking was the attentive service provided by our fresh- faced waiter who promptly pointed out when my normally cheap- date ordered the warm chocolate pudding that it would take 10 minutes as 'it is made from scratch'. The little I tasted was delicious as was the quince and apple terrine with honeyed crème fraîche which, without coffee, brought the bill to £93.25 without service.

And, with that, the definite desire to return.

The Ambassador, 55 Exmouth Market, London EC1R 4QL, 020 7837 0009
Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Closed Sunday evening.