

## PRANDIAL PLEASURE BOY'S OWN BASEMENT

It's fairly safe to say that the owner of Boisdale of Bishopsgate restaurant is something of a *bon viveur*, with majorly hedonistic tendencies. An evening spent in the London restaurant reveals more than a passing interest in good cooking, whisky, cigars, jazz and blues, Scotland and Cuba. It may sound rather eclectic, but the whole thing fits just right.

Boisdale is tucked away in an alley facing Liverpool Street station. Better still, for those with an unshakeable love of good old-fashioned dive bars, most of the action takes place in a basement. But it's older and wiser than the dive bars of my salad days – the food and service are first-rate.

Yet the place has the air of being a well-kept secret. The musicians are close enough to chat to, playing feel-good blues, which is not the contradiction in terms it may seem. On a recent Friday night there was a respectable enough crowd, but when the food arrived it was hard to see why there wasn't a waiting list.

There's a great two-course deal for £17.80 but we ordered à la carte. To start, hot-smoked salmon from South Uist with new potato and horseradish salad (£9.90) and smoked beef bresaola with wild garlic and celeriac remoulade (£8.75) – both expertly and subtly done. A main course of roasted butternut squash, rocket and spinach risotto, goats cheese and gremolata (£13.50) was one of those complexly flavoured and textured vegetarian dishes that convinces people they really could live quite happily without meat. Until, that is, a perfectly turned-out Aberdeen Angus fillet steak, with rosti and morel mushroom sauce arrives.

Puddings were traditional, yet done with flair. But it's Boisdale's extras that transform a great meal into an event: the pudding wines, the regiment of Scotch whiskies, the open encouragement to smoke a cigar... Anyone would think they want you to have a good time.

**Mike Hobart**

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