

time & leisure

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review: olé, olé!

Andy Kakembo visits the magnificent Spanish restaurant in Putney

Olé is magnificent. While London's large Spanish restaurants zig-zag between shout-and-drink venues and churn-it-out tapas bars, Olé cuts its own path serving delicious, imaginative food in a stylish restaurant that manages to be intimate and have the potential to swing into party mode.

4 months new, Olé used to live in Fulham and has moved to a venue four times the size without losing its ability to serve meals crafted with care and imagination. We were greeted by Abdul and Amelia who whiz around the floor in traditional black and white outfits with a playful grace. Engaging and helpful, they made us feel welcome and at ease.

Tapas, starters and mains hold almost equal prominence on the menu, which manages to cover the standards and offer some modern variations for the more adventurous: layers of aubergine served with red pepper syrup, or Queso Manchego served with quince sit alongside the more familiar Calamari à la Romana and Patatas Bravas.

We went for a selection from the starters menu; these are a bit pricier than the tapas selection and it's where the chef's fine dining history shouts out. The Escalivada y Queso was beautifully presented and made up of a hill of roasted Mediterranean vegetables topped with a vibrant tangy goat's cheese, all glistening with herby oil. The roasted peppers and tomatoes were sweet and the cheese lightly grilled and wet. Splendid! The Mar y Tierra consisted of tiger prawns, octopus and earthy oyster mushrooms in a garlic and chilli sauce. The Queso de Cabra Frito con Miel is deep fried goat's cheese with a pear, honey and thyme compote. Sweet and savoury. Lucy and I are sold on Olé.

The wine list is all Spanish, apart from an indulgent champagne. We started the meal with an obligatory Manzanilla, the dry white sherry from Jerez and also had a lovely bottle of Galician Albarino to accompany our starters. The list is well priced and covers the best of Spain; we also found space for a glass of red Rioja to accompany our main.

Cordero Asado con Setas en Su Jugo is a roast rack of lamb with Dauphinois potatoes, oyster mushrooms and herb jus. The lamb is tender and sweet, the potatoes thinly sliced but with definition and a cheese crust, the mushrooms earthy and wet with the herb jus. This is a new type of Spain for me and it's delicious.

There's more to write about the food but I'm stuffed by the memory. If you choose to stick to the tapas, you can eat great food here for a song (they do specials for groups and on Sundays.) If you're feeling a bit more indulgent, the fine dining menu is spectacular.

Olé manages to blend the best of Spain and has the confidence to make a nod to other cooking traditions too, as befits such a diverse crossroads of a country. It has a glamorous pre-dinner bar at the front, attitude, panache and the makings of a great restaurant. Lucky Putney.

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www.olerestaurants.com