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# Dublin food and dining revamp: New restaurants

Ute Junker

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Bastible Bastible has Scandinavia interiors and an open kitchen.

The rain outside only adds to the atmosphere inside Locks, one of Dublin's loveliest restaurants. As I lean back in my high-backed chair, covered in purple velvet, and gaze out over the canal, softly glowing streetlamps illuminate the rain as it falls.

The lovely sight only distracts me for a moment. My attention is firmly focused on the dishes appearing on the table in front of me, courtesy of chef Conor O'Dowd. A delicate veloute of sweet late summer corn, teamed with the even more intense sweetness of a Dublin Bay prawn, is outdone only by the melt-in-your-mouth pastry of a suet pudding, wrapped around a rich filling of braised wild venison.

It's a meal that befits a fine dining restaurant, yet Locks is a pretension-free zone. This neighbourhood restaurant lies just outside central Dublin's tourist zone: a quick 10 minute taxi ride from Temple Bar or 30 minutes on foot, if you get a stride going. It's here, in the ring of inner suburbs surrounding central Dublin, that some of the city's best chefs are now setting up shop.

"We're all about community," says Conor O'Dowd, who opened his restaurant a year ago. That means more than just greeting regulars by name; O'Dowd also supports local artists by displaying their work on his walls, and keeps the menu prices deliberately low. During the week, you can enjoy three courses for as little as €34.

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O'Dowd's community also includes the increasing number of local food producers. O'Dowd sees the growth in artisanal food as an unanticipated upside of Ireland's recent economic woes, with people searching for new sources of income. "People are taking up cheese making, they're opening bakeries and making honey and cordials," he says. "It's fantastic for the city."

O'Dowd is not the only Dublin chef bringing fine food to the suburbs, redefining Irish cuisine along the way. "It's a great time to be a chef in Dublin," says Barry Fitzgerald, who helms yet another newcomer, Bastible. Also coming up for its first anniversary, Bastible is unpromisingly situated on a busy intersection, but its Scandinavian-style interiors and open kitchen make up for its location.

Fitzgerald's tightly edited menus offer a choice of just three entrees, three mains and three desserts – "it allows us to get better quality produce," he explains – and his team makes everything in-house, from the bread and butter to the pickles.

Bastible's seasonal menus feature dishes such as a tender beef tartare served with cep mushrooms and confit egg yolk, and a dish that teams pearl barley – a staple of Irish stew – with Jerusalem artichoke, cheese and egg. Fitzgerald says local diners have responded enthusiastically to his more inventive dishes.

"The local palate is expanding; people are curious to try new things," says Fitzgerald. He says the change reflects new patterns of socialising. "People are as likely to meet for a nice brunch or lunch as they are to go to the pub," he says.

Like Fitzgerald and O'Connor, Ciaran Sweeney worked in kitchens overseas before coming home to open Forest and Marcy. The restaurant/wine bar hybrid follows a similar formula of sophisticated food served in a casual atmosphere. "You can come in for a glass of wine and some small plates, or enjoy three courses," he says.

Forest and Marcy has only been open six months, but has already garnered attention for its sophisticated twist on Irish cuisine. "It's about tapping into our culture," says Sweeney, referring to dazzling dishes such as his fermented potato bread, teamed with bacon and cabbage relish. He

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also updates the traditional beef and oyster pie, ditching the pastry and serving both beef and oyster raw.

Sweeney is also a passionate about making the most of his produce. For his dish of smoked eel with broccoli – where elements of peanut and sesame help deliver a powerful punch of umami – Sweeney steamed the broccoli stems, charred the florets, and used the remainders to create a broccoli puree, while the eel trimmings were used to create a dashi-like glaze. "We're a small restaurant; we have to be as sustainable as possible," he says.

## TRIP NOTES

### MORE INFORMATION

[Ireland.com \(http://www.ireland.com/en-au/\)](http://www.ireland.com/en-au/)

### GETTING THERE

Etihad and Emirates offer one-stop flights to Dublin. See [etihad.com](http://www.etihad.com) and [emirates.com \(http://www.emirates.com/au/english/\)](http://www.emirates.com/au/english/)

### WHERE TO STAY

The centrally located Brooks Hotel features hand-carved furniture and contemporary fabrics. Rates from €160. 59 Drury Street, [brookshotel.ie](http://www.brookshotel.ie)

Located in the Docklands district, the Marker Hotel offers a rooftop bar and five star service. Rates from €229. Grand Canal Square, Docklands, [themarkerhoteldublin.com \(http://www.themarkerhoteldublin.com/\)](http://www.themarkerhoteldublin.com)

### WHERE TO EAT

Locks, 1 Windsor Terrace, Dublin 8, [locksrestaurant.ie](http://locksrestaurant.ie) . Two courses for €28, three courses for €34, discounts for dining between 5.30pm and 7pm.

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