pro vs punter
Clipstone, London W1

Does an average diner reach the same conclusions about restaurants as a food pro, who may get special treatment if recognised?* Laura Rowe and **olive** reader Afsheen Shaikh compare notes on Clipstone, London W1. *clipstonerestaurant.co.uk*



The pro

Our editor **Laura Rowe** joined **olive** in September last year. She's reviewed restaurants for the past nine years. You can follow her on Twitter and Instagram at *@lauraroweeats*



The punter

Afsheen Shaikh lives in London and works for the Civil Service. She loves a gourmet burger and her favourite eating out experience was at Dans Le Noir.



Clipstone

Clipstone is on a corner of Clipstone Street in Fitzrovia and is the sister to nearby (and Michelin-starred) Portland, a modern-European dining room set up by restaurateurs Will Lander and Daniel Morgenthau with chef Merlin Labron-Johnson. Both restaurants pride themselves on high-quality cooking, wine and service, but Clipstone is more casual – here, you can have freshly made sourdough flatbreads from a pizza oven, left-over from the Italian restaurant that was here before it.

There are larger plates including homemade ravioli of hay-baked carrot and ricotta with brown butter and hazelnuts and a tempting array of desserts – lemon sheep's milk ice cream, for example, and the ultimate Paris-Brest (a Parisian bistro classic). Drinks-wise, there are several wines on tap and, for something soft, homemade sodas (including yuzu-ade) and watermelon iced tea. It's all set in a warm, elegantly designed space – expect reclaimed stone, natural linens and outdoor seating.



FOOD MADE GOOD

For Clipstone's sustainability score, visit olivemagazine.com

Our pro says...

Call me old fashioned, but being told while booking a table on a Tuesday night, weeks in advance, that "if the restaurant gets busy we may need the table back in an hour and a half" is not a good start. Lucky then, that this conveyor-belt turnaround wasn't in evidence on the night. In fact, the service was rather special. "I wasn't recognised. The menu was explained and we were walked through the wine list. On-tap (bought-by-the-barrel instead of the bottle) makes drinking great wines by the glass very affordable – my Buil Y Giné Priorat 2014 went down very well.

The food comes out when it's ready, so we tackled the hot plates first. Fried leeks were dipped into a sauce gribiche. A perfect contrast of texture and flavour. Rillettes of duck, pork and foie gras hugged grilled bread bed like a duvet – soft and gamey with a sweet tickle of mustard seed and honey on top.

A salad of tomatoes, raspberries, basil and fermented tomato juice looked the part but didn't quite work. The last of the season, neither the tomatoes nor raspberries delivered on flavour and barely flirted let alone married together.

There are three sourdough pizzas to choose from. More flatbread than pizza, ours had a white sauce of clam, parsley, crème fraîche and garlic and was comforting enough to make you fight over the last slice, although the clams were overwhelmed. Snails suffered a similar fate at the hands of a herby garlic sauce. Yorkshire grouse – breast, confit leg and heart – was pleasantly balanced with pickled blackberries, but not something you'd return for.

But then there was the dish of the night, and perhaps the year: calves brain. Soft, spreadable, milky offal had been cooked simply with butter, jus, capers and lemon juice, and popped on yet more of that great toast. Brain power at an all time high.

After this much you don't need more, but the heavily Instagrammed Paris-Brest needed exploration. The choux was perfect. Its hazelnut filling (Kinder Bueno-like), though, was too thick and rich – a few mouthfuls each and we were done.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Service is as well polished as at its Michelin-starred sister down the road, but the food is far more (dare I say it) inconsistent – ranging from pleasant to some of the best in London. Either way, it's worth a visit for that brain, alone.

Total for two, excluding service £105

FOOD: 8/10
SERVICE: 8/10
VIBE: 8/10

TOTAL 24/30

Our punter says...

Despite being open for such a short time, we were relieved to watch Clipstone fill up quickly on the evening we visited. There's a neighbourhood bistro vibe to this place, and as such it's a bit of a tight squeeze – but it's still bright and welcoming, with retro, school-type wooden chairs. We were warned that dishes would be brought out as soon as they were ready, which led to overcrowding on the table at one point. The menu itself was a little misleading – 'rillettes of rabbit, pork and foie gras', for example, was pâté.

Deep fried leeks in a golden batter (basically tempura) were light and crisp. But I wasn't keen on the accompanying mussels – too heavy on the sake, with too little of the coriander coming through. Char, a member of the salmon family that I've never tried before was served with yellow peach and dollops of cultured cream; the fish was almost raw, delicate and moist with a similar texture to salmon.

The flatbreads were generously sized and very filling. Clam, parsley, crème fraîche and garlic were a clever medley of flavours, as was scallop with walnut pesto and lemon zest. We also tried Yorkshire hogget from the 'larger plates' section – it was delightfully tender, cutting like butter and melting in the mouth. Unfortunately, the Cornish plaice was overdone, buried underneath wilted rainbow chard with miso and pulse butter swimming around the edges.

Desserts sounded too good to resist. Paris-Brest, a circular choux pastry sandwiching a filling of praline, cream and hazelnuts, was decidedly more nutty than sweet. But that was more than made up for by our second, far sweeter dessert – juicy English strawberries, hay and white chocolate cremeux. With each pudding priced at £5 and £6 respectively, we would have happily ordered both again.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Clipstone offers a casual vibe, exceptional service and a tantalising selection of vegetarian, meat and fish options. I'd return for the desserts alone!

Total for two, excluding service: £99.50

FOOD: 8/10
SERVICE: 8/10
VIBE: 8/10

TOTAL 24/30







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