

destroyed, with only façades retained. Facing bankruptcy in the High Court a fortnight ago, Treasury, who have debts of €2.7 billion, thanked “the Government, its agencies and the taxpayer” for their support. We are ever-generous.

But this is not why we're here. According to two Westin websites, The Exchange, under executive chef John Hickey, is 'sensory dining' and 'five-star'. I don't know what this means or believe that any Dublin hospitality deserves stars, however fairly stars are won (in this case, I suspect Westin has slipped Exchange its Bord Fáilte stars).

The menu, presented in fun 1930s-era typeface (imagine the *New Yorker*, trilby hats and jazz), is written for the American in Europe rather than in Ireland. Wines are either overdescribed under “taste” headings or oversimplified, marked ‘Bubbly’, ‘Pink’ and ‘Sweet’. Of gastronomy, while beef, cheese and some seafood are Irish, the recipes are continental and mixed in a mood, like the transient visitor, that's going no place in particular.

It is much better than airplane food. Crusty warm breads came, and to start, scallops with vermouth garlic butter; baked Irish camembert with honey and roasted garlic (scarcely); gnocchi with braised pork cheek and vintage cheddar. Mains veered a little into business class: roast monkfish with Serrano ham, scallion mash and Provençale vegetables that had been dehydrated by roasting. Sirloin steak with vine tomatoes, onion rings and chunky chips did what it does. Chickpea and lentil cake with a poached egg and asparagus spears was surprisingly refined, and surprisingly swiped away as I was lingering over the last forkfuls.

But this showed that the personnel were more like persons. They were what is different about Dublin. They were unlearned in table protocol, uncomfortable in five-star dress and they had some personality.

The girl was 'working my butt off' to get home to California. The boy, who was new and petrified – and forgot our side orders – warmed up as he told my sister he loved the food here, and that he was reading John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. (A 1930s American classic, of course.)

We paid a cheque for €155.95 but we would not do so again. Baked vanilla rice pudding with poached pear and hazelnut biscotti was filmy and far from stellar. It brought us back to 'confused', 'unloved' and 'culture-free'.

We ate it in the yawning multi-story Atrium Lounge, where you can have a sandwich for €13 and afternoon tea for €27, per person. Our restaurant had gone to sleep, behind a sign that said 'The Exchange Restaurant is closed at this time'.

In perfect American.



Turning Japanese

MUSASHI NOODLES & SUSHI BAR

A new Japanese eatery is bound to be a good thing, particularly as Dublin has precious few, beyond high-street noodle and sushi vortexes. Neither Capel Street nor 'BYOB' had prepared us for the sophistication and polish of Musashi. Carpentered beechwood furniture, bamboo wares and (oddly) 1990s love songs created an atmosphere that ennobled even our sluttish bag of Tyskie lager.

We ordered little eats, though wok dishes, ramen and teriyaki grills are all beneath the €15 mark, and looked worthy of attention. Fish comes from the reputed Smithfield mongers Kish. Touchingly, each sushi selection is named after a flower; ours the 'bodan' or peony (€18), with tuna, salmon, squid and pickled mackerel, spongy rice and thick pieces of fish.

Yasai vegetable tempura (€6) was crisp and decadent, ebi gyoza prawn dumplings comforting. Undercutting the freshness, vinegar and sweet were salted edamame soya beans in their pods, and we would have liked if these had come first for protracted beer snacking.

Service was vague and forgetful – our miso

soup appeared on the bill though not on the table, but what matter. We finished with lemon sorbets at €1 a scoop! Proprietor Emma Pei and her partner Bo Lang have done well here and gave a smiling send off when we left. Exciting.

● Musashi Noodles & Sushi Bar, 15 Capel Street, Dublin 1
Tel: 532 8068
musashidublin.com

Pop culture

The next Supper Club Project is on Sunday April 1st at 6:30pm in the Miele Gallery, Citywest Business Campus. Headed up by ex l'Écrivain chefs John Wyer and Sandy Sabek (and frequented by a who's who of the restaurant industry), these events serve up some of the most imaginative menus in Dublin and sell out very quickly. An eight-course tasting menu costs €65. Alcohol is BYO. See popuprestaurant.ie for more.

Yes, CHEF

Oliver Dunne

■ AGE: 34.

■ RESTAURANT: Bon Appétit, Malahide.

■ STYLE OF COOKING: A modern interpretation of the classical French style.

■ FAVOURITE RESTAURANT IN DUBLIN: I like to bring my family to La Brasserie.

■ DEATH ROW DINNER: A snackbox and chips. And a can of coke. There's a time and place for fine dining and death row isn't it!



■ KITCHEN DISASTERS: Despite being self-taught, I've managed to avoid any real disasters!

■ INGREDIENTS OF THE MOMENT: Rare breed Irish beef.

■ ESSENTIAL KITCHEN GADGET: My waterbath.

■ SECRET INGREDIENTS/TIPS: Keep your knives and wits sharp!

■ THREE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS IN A RESTAURANT: Great food, good service and consistency.