

## Tierra Brindisa W1



From the famous Spanish food importers – a sibling to their Borough tapas bar, with an expensive Continental look; its tapas dishes show promise, but they're neither cheap nor wholly consistent; (a perch at the bar is a good option here).

It's nice to see how the other half lives. The other half in this case are those reviewers who fraternise on a fairly regular basis with the trade.

My lunching companion at this new Soho venture (part of an empire based on Borough Market's famous Iberian food importers) contributes to various publications and is to be found at any serious industry junket. It took about 6 nanoseconds for him to be spotted by the chef: the precursor of a raft of freebies, including Cava, olives, and cod carpaccio (the dish of which the chef declared himself particularly proud)... To his credit, though, it was my companion who spotted these items to be missing (rightly) from our bill, and reminded me to adjust my final verdict on value accordingly.

Now for an admission. We've personally never totally bought into the wave of foodie reverence for this venture's elder sibling: Tapas Brindisa SE1, by Borough Market. Mentions of it in the press are invariably couched in terms of hushed foodie respect – to be fair, mirrored by success in our survey this year – but it is a somewhat expensive place, where, despite the undoubted quality of its raw materials, we don't think the realisation of dishes always shines. And, a packed and no-nonsense venue, its interior is no great shakes.

Well, one thing you couldn't say about this latest Brindisa venture is that they haven't invested in the design. It's much more 'grown up' than Borough. From the marble bar to the sleek Continental (slightly cold) décor throughout, there's the feeling of a project someone has really invested in. This packed and bustling space is, however, most atmospheric around the rear bar – we didn't feel at all shortchanged to be perched there on stools, having been unable to nab a table.

The succession of tapas reflected many of the strengths and weaknesses sometimes reported in its Borough forebear: nice idea, impeccable ingredients, but slightly iffy realisation; oh, and not cheap. Lamb chops would have tasted beautiful if they hadn't been undercooked. A lentil and cheese goo sounded interesting... but wasn't. Escabeche of quail was a bitty yawn. The aforementioned cod carpaccio was actually the best dish of this bunch: full of perky flavours.

Each of these cute little dishes was "over" very quickly, yet none was priced south of a fiver, so while you can eat here inexpensively, you might leave hungry. Our final dish helped on that score, however. We were reluctant to finish the turrón mousse (lots of honey and almonds) with PX (sweet wine) and macerated raisins, not because it wasn't delicious – actually it was – but because calorifically speaking each mouthful packed a punch. Coffee to finish, however, tasted neither here nor there.

So we left with a list of pros and cons. We can readily understand why the local Soho media operatives have fallen on the place; it's easy-going yet looks smart. And it feels like it has commitment to a concept. Now all they have to do is fully carry it off.