

# Blarney can now compete with culinary capitals of the world

## THE SQUARE TABLE

★★★★

5 The Square, Blarney,  
Co. Cork  
Ph: (021) 438 2825

**I**T'S HARD not to notice how Dublin's foodie scene is dizzying itself with new restaurant openings, most of them hugely enjoyable and appealing. It's so reassuring to know our capital is successfully competing on a culinary level with most other capitals. And who doesn't like a situation like that?

Well, I'm glad to report that that particular kettle of fish is spreading nationwide. Hidden away in Blarney in a handsome stone cottage, not far from the babbling run of the River Martin and the gentle touristy thrum of the woollen mills, something special is happening - a small Irish bistro is serving exquisite Irish food.

It is not thrillingly different to what's happening in the big city, but it is thrillingly, rousingly, and entertainingly different to what's happening in most of rural Ireland. Even the dining room is a cut above the anonymous norm I was expecting. The Square Table's online photos don't do it justice at all.

The menu is immediately eye-catching. There is beef carpaccio, crispy eggs, rib-eye with shallot confit, and fregula pasta with caponata and courgette purée. It's mostly inspired by local produce, and is bulky with promise.

We start with a mixed charcuterie board of spiced



### The Damage

2 starters, 2 mains,  
2 desserts..... €71.95  
Bottle of wine..... €22.00  
**Total €93.95**

beef, West Cork salami and chorizo, ham hock and house-smoked duck on (I think) a beetroot compote. Flavours are big, effective and delicious, especially the homemade tomato/apple chutney and piccalilli.

Mains are equally enjoyable and plentiful. There's no disputing the deliciousness of the crispy-skinned fillet of hake, the white flesh falling apart at the touch of a knife, and the col-

ourful caponata and pickled violet artichoke. Likewise, with the slices of roasted monkfish in an amazing veloute of sweet potato, chilli, and lemongrass, neatly dressed with heavenly crab tortellini.

It's a gorgeous, self-assured

dish that is close to perfection.

Less elegant and not entirely in keeping with the mains are sides of mash and chunky carrot with sugar snaps. They taste perfectly fine, but are just slightly out of place.

Dreamy desserts of chocolate brownie with chocolate mousse and a scoop of salted caramel ice-cream, and a lemon chilboust (crème pâtissière lightened with cream) accompanied by zingy passion fruit and mango sorbet are the definition of what proper desserts should be.

Usually, it's next to impossible to find a truly quaffable wine for under €30 in Irish restaurants. The Square Table's tantalising sauvignon blanc-viognier amazes. It is crammed with full-bodied lush notes of peach, pear and melon - and at €22, it's a steal.

This fantastic bistro delivers on all its promises, and that signals a very bright future indeed. It's a destination eatery that's certainly worth making the effort for. I can't imagine an evening when I wouldn't want to eat here again.

In fact, I think the burghers of Blarney should unveil a commemorative plaque to twin sisters Tricia and Martina Cronin (pictured above). In just over two years they have singlehandedly raised culinary standards that any up-and-coming local restaurateurs will have no choice but to aim for. But what is most striking, for me, is the sheer unexpected quality of it all. +

## GRAPESPY

BY JEAN SMULLEN

**Skinny Prosecco €24.99**

With everyone more conscious of their sugar intake, this super new organic Prosecco will appeal. It has just 67 calories per glass, and half the sugar of regular Prosecco. It has lovely pear and red apple flavours, and is fully Spumante (fizzy) with an ABV of 11%. Brand new to the market, it can be bought online at [www.winesoftheworld.ie](http://www.winesoftheworld.ie). For wine events [www.jean-smullen.com](http://www.jean-smullen.com).



★ KEEP WALKING. DON'T EVEN STOP AT THE DOOR ★★ CHANCE IT, IT BEATS A NIGHT IN FRONT OF THE TV  
★★★ MIDDLE OF THE ROAD ★★★★★ WELL WORTH THE MONEY ★★★★★ THIS PLACE IS HEAVEN FOR THE TASTE BUDS