

A FEAST IN THE EAST

Italian might fail postcode challenge but it gets stamp of approval



Coia's Cafe,
473-477 Duke
Street, Glasgow
Tel: 0141 554
3822

Food ✓✓✓✓
Atmosphere ✓✓✓✓
Service ✓✓✓✓

✓✓✓✓ EXCELLENT ✓✓✓ GOOD
✓✓ AVERAGE ✓ DISAPPOINTING

NUDGED the trilby higher up my forehead and let out a shrill whistle. The Moll was dressed to thrill ... all fishnets and foxfur, little red number and killer stilettos.

I thought for a minute Crimbo had come early and wondered if she was my secret Santa waiting to be unwrapped.

She looked like a real classy broad.

Not surprisingly, the Moll looked slightly miffed when I yanked on the Buick's handbrake outside Coia's Café in Dennistoun.

No matter how people talk it up, this part of the East End will never be the new West End... Duke Street ain't no Byres Road.

But Coia's Café has been has been a proud cornerstone of this famous thoroughfare for 80 years and I have to say the old dame looked in great shape.

Unpretentious it may be, but it was as spick as the proverbial new pin when we took our seats.

And The Moll's retro look blended in perfectly with 50s-style tables and décor that reminded me of a vintage New York deli.

The aroma of Italian cooking washed over us.

It was intoxicating and the menu was equally breathtaking. I counted more than 20 appetisers and 40 main courses. And not all of them were the usual Italian suspects. For example, beef olives

THE BILL, PLEASE

STARTERS

Fresh mussels with chilli and garlic, £7.50
Minestrone, £3.95
Two portions of garlic bread, £5.90

MAINS

Beef stroganoff with a brandy and mushroom sauce with rice and French fries, £10.50.
Chicken breast cooked in a

white wine and onion sauce, £14.95

DESSERT

Two ice creams, £5.90

DRINKS

Two bottles of Peroni, £5.90
Two red wines, £6.50

TOTAL: £61.10

and gravy – a family favourite in Tec towers – isn't a naturally recurring theme in most of the Azzurri joints I recce.

First, though, I wanted to wet my whistle and ordered a bottle of Peroni and a glass of red for my scarlet lady.

For a starter I opted for the mussels in garlic, even though the price was definitely more West than East End.

But one mouthful told me they were worth paying the extra scheckels. Indeed, I would go as far as to say they're the best I've tasted for a while. I savoured the on-the-day freshness and the garlic just helped to lift the mussels on to a higher plain. Beautiful. And the bread was moist and not too crispy.

The Moll opted for the minestrone soup, thinking that

in a family restaurant like this, minestrone will be just as mamma used to make it. And mamma didn't let her down with a bowl packed with vegetables and the odd crouton thrown in too.

The service was exemplary as a waiter kept on checking that everything was tip top...which, so far, it was.

The drinks had disappeared faster than anticipated so we ordered some more. But we barely had time to digest our starters when the mains arrived.

“ Outstanding was the Moll's verdict as she licked the sauce and let the taste linger

That said, my chicken breast was screaming 'eat me' even though my overworked digestive system was screaming 'spare me'.

The portion would have choked the proverbial stallion. More important, though, the cooking was right on the money.

The chicken peeled away on my cutlery but was almost too good to devour. And the white wine sauce was rich and creamy and clearly had been carefully prepared. Food of the highest order.

The Moll, strangely, opted to avoid an Italian job and plumped instead for the beef stroganoff. But chef Coia went the extra mile with a dish drizzled in a brandy and mushroom sauce and beef that was pure Aberdeen Angus. And the bed of rice just topped it all off.

Outstanding was the Moll's verdict as she licked the last ounce of sauce from her fork and let the taste linger.

By now, tables were becoming sparse and a build-up of customers was forming near the bar.

That said, who comes to Coia's without sampling its ice cream?

Three large helpings of vanilla later and we reckoned we had visited Coia's at its sundae best.

The Moll flicked back the foxfur and I flicked six tenners and a five spot at the waiter, a fair rate for super seran and, if truth be told, a feast in the east.