



reviews



the hoxton pony london

The entry of a confident, strutting steed proved a change of tack for venues usually found in this corner of London. Thanks to the collective efforts of Gerry Calabrese, Andy Pearson and the impressive team they have chosen to surround themselves with, Curtain Street now has something to really shout about. Scarrying indoors from the rain pelting

down on Shoreditch, we almost missed the stuffed birds perched either side of the bar as we were led to our little red table, positioned under what looked like the remains of a white Fiat Uno. Yannik Allard designed the space so don't expect a typical Shoreditch-styled joint. It's tough to come into a venue operated by messrs Calabrese and Pearson

and not expect a fine variety of liquids. So fear not. The menu is packed with interesting drinks, a good beer selection (Innis and Gao, Union, Meantime and BrewDog varieties all appear) and there are enough wines to keep oenologists interested. But it's the cocktails which should get the bony paying dividends to those who invested in it, and rightly so.

The innovative self-cooling infusion jars, around £65 a pop, come served up with branded tea cups and receive much attention, but there are plenty more tricks on offer. The Deep Throat (27.50, lime, Demerara sugar, coriander and Sailor Gerry) worked beautifully – balanced, refreshingly tart and fruity enough to get the aromas circling in your looter, while the Stockholm Bramble (blackberries, quince liqueur, lemon granulated sugar, lemon juice and Cape North) was like chomping straight into a great big, alcoholic, blackberry.

A Grandad's Bookmark (cherries, port, homemade almond and cinnamon syrup, Angostura bitters and Bookers cask strength) was also spot on – full of depth, complexity and a sweet edge soothing the palate and a frayed, Friday night mind.

The back bar is jam-packed with pleasures, while in front, bartenders are quick, attentive and full of personality, reflecting the ability that all decent bars seem able to discover: the tendency to make the whole operation look strangely easy. It's only when you sit down and follow what's actually happening here that the full extent of the effort reveals itself, from the bartenders to the priceless qualities of a good waitress – no pressure, just perfectly timed chuck ups on proceedings, taken for granted when successful but a pain in the neck when absent.

This is the type of attention to detail that bodes well for The Pony. The food too, a mélange of classic east end grub (yep, including jellied eels) has been well thought through and gets cooked in an open kitchen at one end of the bar. Thai British staple, sausage and mash, using good quality bangers, creamy mash and onion gravy, doesn't try to do too much and fills gaps, while fish and chips comes in the form of battered salmon, sat alongside mushy peas and chips.

Downstairs you'll find a DJ booth, dance floor, and a peculiar combination of punters – eclectic media-bods booping, creative's chatting, suits mingling amiably, and city sorts supping on champers, though it has to be hoped that the wandering band and leering eye variety from this group will find somewhere else



to drink fairly soon. Because frankly, while their wads of songs will no doubt help coffers, this bar is far too good for them.

Perhaps that is the only criticism to be levelled at The Pony: the atmosphere downstairs needs a little work, though one would presume another month or so will see those more organic elements of a new bar coming to the fore.

It's the collective effect of lots of good things done well here that add up to so much, and that should ensure The Pony's success. It isn't quite yet an unmissable thoroughbred, but it's getting pretty darn close. **Richard Middleton**

what CLASS thinks
drinks: ********* service: *********
design: ********* atmosphere: *********
value for money: *********
the best bit: spot on staff

The Hoxton Pony
104-106 Curtain Road,
Shoreditch
EC2A 3AN
020 7813 2844
Mon-Fri 11am-11pm, Sat 11am-1pm
Fri-Sat 11am-12am, Sat-Sun 12pm-2am
Sun 12pm-12am