# 10 Tib Lane, Manchester: ‘There’s a lot to be stimulated by’ – restaurant review

The Roman orgy murals are long gone, but the cooking at 10 Tib Lane is full of voluptuous pleasure

**[10 Tib Lane](https://www.10tiblane.com/), Manchester M2 4JB (0161 833 1034). Small and large  
plates £8-£20, desserts £7, wines from £24**

All restaurant locations have history. The tall, narrow building at 10 Tib Lane, just back from Manchester’s Princess Street, is no exception. Tonight, chef Robert Owen Brown is the keeper of the memories. “I lugged flagstones up there,” he says, pointing at the stairs to the floor above. He waves a hand airily towards the far end of this dimly lit first-floor dining room. “That was a mirrored door made of smoked glass with a big brass cock for a handle.” Back then the place was called Lounge 10, which sounds like the death throes of a terrible movie franchise that peaked at Lounge 3. Owen Brown was the opening chef and clearly, before launch, assistant builder. The Roman orgy murals were decidedly not safe for work, and at weekends the management installed a clairvoyant in the bogs. “We did a truffle pizza,” says Owen Brown. “And a smoked fillet of beef with quail eggs. Rather good all of that, actually.”

A dozen years on and we live in times which are, depending on your point of view, either drearily puritanical or simply more considerate. Today, at the eponymous 10 Tib Lane, a door knob is not something at which you point and snigger. It merely opens doors. The floors are dark varnished boards, the walls are distressed brick on one side and white tile on the other. The website boasts a declaration of intent, written by the trio of Manchester hospitality veterans behind the business: “Classic cocktails, natural wine that doesn’t scare you off, beer that matters and seasonal food with the best produce we can get our hands on.” Fair enough.

We should put this one alongside places like [Erst](https://www.erst-mcr.co.uk/) in Ancoats, the recently reviewed [Climat](https://www.theguardian.com/food/2023/jan/22/climat-manchester-youve-come-to-the-right-place-restaurant-review), the soon to open [Higher Ground](https://www.highergroundmcr.co.uk/), the Alan and [Another Hand](https://anotherhandmcr.com/). All offer eclectic small plates and a knowingly idiosyncratic drinks list. Somewhere along the way Manchester was culinarily twinned with Hackney. Although of course, a declaration of intent is worthless if the cooking doesn’t pop and slap. Tonight, we are mob-handed. There are six of us at the table and nine dishes, so let’s find out. Yes please, we’ll have all of them, and a few twice over.

Modern trends have been attended to: there are menu mentions of cured egg yolk, charred hispi cabbage and sourdough toast. But there’s also a wonderful old-school sensibility at work. It’s displayed in a series of sauces and dressings which are coat-the-back-of-a-spoon thick, and built around huge sweet and sour flavours. Sweetbreads are breaded and deep-fried, like chicken nuggets for grownups, but come on a thick, emulsified grain mustard sauce full of seeds that pop pleasingly against the top of your mouth. That blackened slab of cabbage is partnered with a sauce that digs deep into the sweet, sugary tones of slowly roasted shallots. A big old pork chop is seared so the ribbon of fat is properly crisp, and the handle of bone is eminently nibbleable. It’s dressed with a gravy which makes a grand virtue of the sticky gelatine joys in a deep chicken jus the colour of oak varnish. Behold the celeriac purée on the side, made by someone who seemingly spent some part of their career in a big, fancy kitchen being barked at to pass their purées through a chinois time and again, until they were soft and silky enough to smooth out WH Auden’s face.

An impeccably made smoked trout mousse is the salmon pink of a posh 1970s napkin and tablecloth set. It’s saved from being the sort of thing that would have been passed around with the melba toast at one of [Margo Leadbetter](https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jul/08/charlotte-mcdougall-on-penelope-keith-margo-good-life-comedy-hero)’s soirées in Surbiton by the modish addition of salmon roe, glinting rose in the candlelight. And then there is the truly spectacular, supple and subtle cooking of a boned plaice meunière, the pearly flesh holding together, with caper butter and nutty brown shrimps and all-round coastal loveliness. That last word may not describe flavour; it does communicate the surge of glowing emotion engendered by one well-cooked fish. It’s enough to moisten the eye of a classically trained chef like Owen Brown, further down the table.

There are a couple of flourishes. A version of Fergus Henderson’s hot, wobbly roasted bone marrow with salty, vinegary parsley salad, is served not with the usual thick wedges of sourdough toast. It comes, instead, with golden blocks of what they call pommes Anna, but which are closer to the currently very popular, and always welcome, deep-fried confit potatoes. It may not be quite enough potato for the job. Save a bit of the toasted sourdough which comes with the steak tartare, served in a big heap and topped with a scribble of what they call an egg yolk purée. Given that yolk is already a liquid, I don’t quite understand the purée thing. But it does soften the mustardy pile of chopped beef. Partner it with the salad of brightly dressed bitter leaves with chewy strands of roasted oyster mushroom. Complete the nine-dish menu with a sustaining plateful of red wine-braised lentils, looking like black gravel in the low-lit room, with deep chewy roasted jerusalem artichokes.

Half the dessert list is made up of either British cheeses or a glass of Christmassy Pedro Ximénez sherry, but those are both merely examples of tasteful shopping. Far more beguiling is a deep-filled, shuddering caramel tart, the crisp pastry cut to a fine arrowhead of a point, the golden custard surface sprinkled with a little bright white sea salt. Or there’s a rectangle of deep-fried bread and butter pudding, crusted with sugar, its centre warm and custardy, with a scoop of brandy cream on the side. Do you want some of that? Well of course you do. No dish breaks £20 and most are only just over £10.

The wine list is short. There is, of course, that scary talk of low-intervention wines which, as one friend at the table says, may be delightful when drunk at the winery, but taste only of death and unhappiness elsewhere. Happily, we find our way to a couple of conventional bottles: a zesty, lemony white from Savoie by Jean Perrier and a soft, round St Emilion by Château Marchand. The filthy murals may have been chipped away but amid the guttering candles and old-school sauciness, there’s now an awful lot to be stimulated by at 10 Tib Lane.