# Lerpwl, Liverpool: ‘From the off they are pushing the tasting menus’ – restaurant review

Despite the laidback vibe and ambitious cooking, Lerpwl would rather you did things their way

**Lerpwl, Britannia Pavilion, Albert Dock,**[**Liverpool**](https://www.theguardian.com/uk/liverpool)**L3 4AD (0151 909 6241; lerpwl.com). Tasting menus £50 and £90, plus supplements. Snacks £3.50-£9, plates £9-£24, desserts £9, wines from £31**

Recently, I was emailed by Liam Barrie, one of the brothers behind Lerpwl in Liverpool. Might I consider reviewing the restaurant that he and Ellis Barrie had opened in 2020? Not only might I consider it: I had considered it feverishly, multiple times, and with good reason. The Barrie brothers have a great story. As very young men they turned a small café, by a remote mobile home park in Anglesey, into what quickly became a point of gastronomic pilgrimage. The [Marram Grass](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/jul/15/food-with-a-view-great-places-to-eat-outdoors) was reputedly a place that took North Wales’s finest ingredients and turned them into edible wonders. Now they had moved to the city and taken over a space in the redbrick mercantile palace which is Albert Dock for Lerpwl, the Welsh for Liverpool.

Early on, I looked at their [website](https://www.lerpwl.com/). I looked at it every time I was due to review in Liverpool. Each time I was driven to disappointed, knuckle-chewing distraction. The menus were on dropbox links, a nightmare on mobile, if they worked at all. This stuff matters. Restaurants, sort your websites. An extraordinary number hide their street address away in a dusty digital recess or don’t bother to include it at all. And please, add a phone number for people who are running late and want to tell you. The booking websites are a nightmare for this sort of thing. Why not offer a WhatsApp number if you can’t bear the idea of talking to your customers?

The bigger problem with Lerpwl was the proposition. You could have anything you liked there as long as it was a tasting menu, either at £90 or £50, but with multiple supplements which added an extra £31 to both. One menu was called the “Capricious”. What? A dinner marked by sudden changes of mood and behaviour? If I wanted that, I could stay home and argue with my family. It all just sounded exhausting. I hadn’t pointed any of this out. If enough people want a £121 tasting menu, then good luck to them. But as they had now asked me to come, I explained why I hadn’t. They acknowledged my points.

Recently, I looked back at their website. And lo, the dropbox links had gone, broken links had been fixed, and they had introduced a “plates” menu, essentially an à la carte: a few snacks, some bigger plates, three steak cuts, all for sharing. The least I could do was book a table. First the fundamentals: despite all the grand tasting-menu stuff, they make a lot of their relaxed vibe. While the square open kitchen is staffed with very intense, very wired young men, the big broad room vibrates with friendly, relaxed chatter. It’s a place of hard surfaces, original Victorian columns and bare tables dressed with enough cutlery to cater a rugby club buffet.

Some of the food really is spectacular. Among the short snacks list are silvery Menai oysters. One is dressed with a dice of compressed cucumber, glistening pearls of dill oil and a spritz of sweet acidity; the other comes with fermented chilli, sesame and seaweed. Both are a total knockout burst of invigorating seaside loveliness. There’s a tart of minutely cubed duck pastrami in a beautifully folded savoury tuile. Their cylindrical triple-cooked chips are as golden as polished copper coins and come with a hilariously rich, artery-nagging hollandaise made with duck fat rather than olive oil. Some might find this overwhelming; I have never been overwhelmed by duck fat. They serve a terrific Little Gem salad with diced cucumbers, under snowfalls of grated Keen’s cheddar and a dressing heavy with the waft of lovage.

Sadly, not everything is like this. The cooking reminds me of some local amateur choral society where the sopranos are magnificent and always punch through joyously, but the tenors are just a bit ropey and sad. Take their fried chicken. It’s a single thigh for £6. Bizarrely, they’ve removed the skin, which is an offence against the vengeful gods of fried chicken. What happens when you batter a skinless piece of chicken? The batter just slides straight off, like it’s an insect shedding its carapace. It comes on a deep green herby emulsion, which in turn is on a piece of monogrammed paper. The paper quickly turns to torn rags in the bowl.

I admire the preparation of a piece of aged duck, but it arrives with a quenelle of confit duck leg that is a gummy mulch. There’s a truly terrible dish of undercooked aubergine, with a bland buttermilk dressing that tastes of very little. Desserts, while Instagram-ready, amount to artful splodges of foams and quenelles of sorbet. The nearest thing to structure is an iced parfait under a crisp white chocolate dome. Unfortunately, the parfait is flavoured with lavender. We are firmly in aged, slack-elastic, knicker-drawer territory.

There are other issues, including a cheery waiter who firmly declines to use a paper and pen to take our order despite being invited to do so. That might explain why we are brought a beetroot dish we didn’t ask for. We send it away. We are told that everything will arrive when it’s ready, which is odd because they happily serve those tasting menus in a specific order. It’s also annoying. Things land at weird times, like the chips, which arrive late with the salad, not with the snacks among which they are listed. And while they say everything is for sharing, the table is too small for the number of plates that arrive at once. Our waiter gets a little agitated when we decline to order the bread, as if we’ve committed some great faux pas. Finally, there’s the baffling wine list. The Old World whites start with something cheerfully drinkable from Slovenia for a chunky £32 before leaping majestically, to an English Pinot Gris at £60. There is nothing in between. Prinks might well be in order.

When I booked, I was required to choose a menu and specified the new à la carte, but right from the off they are pushing the tasting menus, which still come with £19 worth of supplements. I got the impression that, for all their proclamations of informality and relaxed vibes and good times, their heart’s really not in the whole à la carte thing. Certainly, they’re not very good at it. They want to be a tasting menu restaurant. That’s their thing. Fair enough. If they can find the punters willing to cough up the big wedge, that’s really what they should stick with.