**Leftfield, Edinburgh: ‘Just the place for a dark night’ – restaurant review**

Classic dishes served with poise and elegance. There are so many reasons to linger at this bistro

**Leftfield, 12 Barclay Terrace, Edinburgh EH10 4HP (0131 229 1394,**[**leftfieldedinburgh.co.uk**](https://www.leftfieldedinburgh.co.uk/)**). Starters £8-£12, mains £14-£25, desserts £7.50-£8.50, wines from £28.**

Leftfield, a small bistro overlooking the Meadows in Edinburgh, isn’t particularly. This is not a criticism. Of course, unconventional leftfield ideas are what drive things on. Without leftfield culinary thinking we would never have known that shellfish and vanilla are brilliant bedfellows (they really are) or that chips could benefit from being cooked three times rather than just twice (thank you, Heston) or that scallops and black pudding were single ingredients that needed to couple up (bravo, [Bruno Loubet](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/bruno-loubet)).

But being unconventional can also be tiresome. It can lead to a chef who is desperate for the “wow factor”, bringing crispy bacon to the table [hanging from a miniature washing line](https://twitter.com/wewantplates/status/836287099124998145?lang=en-GB), or another serving a citrus foam [in the plaster cast of the chef’s mouth](https://www.everywhereist.com/2021/12/bros-restaurant-lecce-we-eat-at-the-worst-michelin-starred-restaurant-ever/). Which you are then invited to lick out. In the restaurant world it’s too easy for the pursuit of the unconventional to tip into the seriously, profoundly annoying. When all you really wanted was a nice bit of dinner.

Leftfield will give you a nice bit of dinner. It belongs to chef Phil White, who previously cooked at Fischer’s in Leith. He is joined by his partner Rachel Chisholm who learned the business running an outside catering company. It should be noted that, on the map, the restaurant sits to the left of the Meadows, one of Edinburgh’s most venerable green lungs. And also, quite possibly, a field, hence. On a long summer’s evening, when the Scottish daylight never seems to quite get round to draining from the skies, I imagine you could sit in the tiny dining room, nursing a glass of something chilled, and watch more committed people than you running round the park. The room is a cosy deep-sea green which, even on a dark night like ours, echoes the lamplit lawns outside. There are shelves of pot plants to keep the walls company. This evening, a few tables are occupied by groups of women of a certain age, heads bowed towards each other, solicitously in pursuit of the latest news.

This is food over which to take your friends’ emotional pulse. It describes itself broadly as a seafood bistro. Accordingly, the sample menu online featured a beguiling hot shellfish platter at £85 for two, an apparent three-ring circus of claw, tail, shell and black amethyst eye. I was relieved to find it wasn’t on tonight’s menu because I’m a total sucker for that sort of thing. I would have had to spend the following paragraphs devising some desperate excuse for why I ordered what would have been by far the most expensive dish available, when the pathetic reason for getting armpit deep in buttery shells would only have been my simple desire to eat it. This would have given an unbalanced view of the short menu, listing starters that hover around a tenner and mains that are mostly in the teens.

It is the kind of untroubling restaurant where roasted beets come with goat’s cheese, and mussels from Shetland – always Shetland – are opened in a steaming pot of white wine, garlic and herbs because you can’t improve on the good ways. There’s the occasional knowing flourish. Fat curls of deep-fried squid, diamond-scored and cornflour-battered, lie on a generous mound of mayo rendered a deep pink courtesy of strident gochujang. Hummus is not just hummus. It is boosted by fistfuls of chopped basil and presented with thin upright fins of crisp toast and fronds of fresh herbs. It’s a little under-seasoned, but quickly wakes up with a forceful squeeze of the half lime that came with the squid and an encouraging sprinkle of salt.

For £25, they’ll do you half a lobster thermidor; times it by two for the whole beast. Or just stick with a sensitively fried piece of snowy hake, in a lake of a beurre blanc dotted with black beads of roe, that a century’s worth of French chefs would nod at approvingly. Throw in a dice of raw, deseeded tomato and some roasted new potatoes and happiness abounds. The same understanding of the virtues of classicism, which isn’t broken and really doesn’t need fixing thank you very much, is present in a piece of braised brisket that has been loitering in the oven for many hours. It comes with pommes Anna, kale, a hefty grating of fudgy Shepherd’s Store cheese and a deep lustrous truffled gravy; the sort that will fake tan your insides just as willingly as it comforts them.

There are only two desserts if you don’t count the cheese, which I rarely do. There’s the purple flash of roasted plums with vanilla ice-cream and the bright green of crushed pistachios, or a quenelle of a deep dark chocolate mousse that stays just the right side of cloying, with the sugary hit of a sesame-clustered tuile and a creamy, miso caramel hazelnut sauce.

There is a quiet ambition here at Leftfield, but drill down and it’s clear that they never let any of this get in the way of the fundamental business of looking after people and making sure they are fed. Which is exactly what our waiters do. They exude the gentle air of this being less a place of work, than job as surrogate family.

Squint through the darkness outside the picture windows and you can see the lights of Edinburgh University on the other side of the Meadows. A lot of the city’s well-heeled students live in the townhouses that fringe the park and I’m sure their equally well-heeled parents bring their offspring here both to feed them and to check up on their emotional wellbeing. The wine list wanders amiably from France to Spain to Italy and back again, in an equally untroubling manner. If you want to get expansive, order an Italian dessert wine with pudding. It will give you even more of an excuse to linger.

Sometimes I identify restaurants to review a fair distance out. Not this time. Yet again this was a case of being in town and looking for options. Yet again I was stymied by the number of places that don’t open until Thursday evening, or which only offer the sort of tasting menus that make my palms itchy. It is, I know, simply a mark of the challenges faced by the restaurant sector right now. Then I stumbled upon Leftfield. It looked just the thing for a dark November night in Edinburgh. That’s exactly what it was.