# The Palmerston, Edinburgh: ‘It’s a great dinner’ – restaurant review

Invest in yourself at the Palmerston in Edinburgh if you are banking on having a good time

[**The Palmerston**](https://www.thepalmerstonedinburgh.co.uk/)**, 1 Palmerston Place, Edinburgh EH12 5AF (0131 220 1794). Snacks and starters £4-£10, mains £17-£24, desserts £6, wines from £24**

In the brutal depths of a cost-of-living crisis, when some people still have money for the cream on the top and far too many do not even have enough for the basics underneath, going for dinner in a space that was once a bank could be spun as brutally symbolic. Here is a former financial institution, still servicing those with enough filthy lucre to invest in a rich return, only in different ways. There’s a joke in here somewhere about pork-based restaurants trading mammon for gammon, but I do have my pride.

The point is that anybody with a scintilla of humanity should feel uncomfortable about being financially fine while so many others are not. Then again, we are all capable of holding two thoughts in our head at once. We can be appalled by the current economic situation, overseen by cowards and intellectual lightweights more interested in their own greasy, suppurating parliamentary careers than the wellbeing of the people they are meant to serve. But we can also wonder whether the [Palmerston](https://www.thepalmerstonedinburgh.co.uk/) in Edinburgh is a nice place to go for dinner. It is, by the way. We’ll get there in a moment.

Certainly, the last thing the economy needs right now is for people who can afford to do so, to no longer spend their money. Allowing more restaurants to go out of business because of a very British strain of middle-class embarrassment, only putting more people out of work while depriving food and drink producers of income, is not a route out of recession. It’s a route deeper into it. And if you still think the restaurant business is some sort of rip-off, pursued by get-rich-quick merchants, perhaps you’d like to have a crack at it yourself. Sure, there are con artists in hospitality. There are in all sectors. But for the vast majority, the struggle is the same as for everyone else. They are faced by spiralling energy, food and labour costs that have to be recouped so they can stay afloat and make it to the other side.

So I’m going to repeat the other argument for former banks, a resource with which Edinburgh seems uncommonly blessed. As I pointed out earlier this year when I reviewed [Double Dragon](https://www.theguardian.com/food/2022/mar/13/jay-rayner-restaurant-review-double-dragon-london-just-a-great-night-out), they make fabulous dining rooms. The former Bank of Scotland building on St Andrew Square has recently opened as the [Gleneagles Townhouse](https://gleneagles.com/townhouse/?gclid=Cj0KCQjw3eeXBhD7ARIsAHjssr8RtOEs9TQLAKLo-qIefY3IqkgV86ta6xMHYlurVUCNMez5-DKJVAYaAurxEALw_wcB) and boasts a restaurant, the Spence, full of vault and cornice and grandeur. It’s practically next door to another former banking hall, which in 2018 opened as Edinburgh’s outpost of [Hawksmoor](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2012/nov/18/jay-rayner-restaurant-hawksmoor-air-street).

And now, on the other side of the city’s heart, there’s the Palmerston, occupying a corner site that was also once a bank. The floors are partly laid with polished wood, partly tiled in black and white. There are walls of olive green and handsome globe lights and huge portrait windows. It’s a big sturdy room for serving big sturdy dishes. The food is solid, comforting and beautifully executed and puts satisfaction a little way ahead of drop-dead gorgeousness. The Palmerston is also a bakery and going by the crunchy-crusted sourdough that exercises the molars encouragingly, a very good one.

The restaurant, which takes its name from its address, opened last year, and is a partnership between Australian-born Lloyd Morse, who previously cooked at London’s Spring, and Edinburgh native James Snowdon who was formerly the general manager of Fulham’s [Harwood Arms](https://www.theguardian.com/food/2020/apr/19/enduring-love-30-years-of-the-great-british-gastropub). It proclaims a profound interest in working with local farmers, using as much of the animal as possible and only serving what’s good right now. The result is a constantly changing menu; the photographs taken a few days after my visit may not therefore represent exactly what I had, but you’ll get the idea.

I can only feel deep love for a menu that starts with a big plate of puffed crispy pig skin, like giant Quavers but served hot, spice-dusted and lightly vinegared. The night we are there, they are offering a suet pie of hogget and bacon with buttered cabbage to share for £33. Only the imperative to eat more than one main course between us stops me going for it. There is roast chicken for two or three with chips and béarnaise at £45, or a whole mackerel with tomatoes, capers and parsley. It’s the best sort of well-written menu; one that makes you imagine yourself eating all those dishes, with a greedy sigh.

Not all of it is dependent on the animal. Among the starters there’s a hugely satisfying plate of both green beans and newly podded broad beans, like shimmering emeralds peeking through, with pickled red onion, the crunch of walnuts and a thick dusting of pecorino. Then again, there’s also a salad of pickled tripe, a neglected ingredient which, prepared properly, deserves all the love. It is both meaty and bouncy and comes with dripping-fried croutons, dinky boats of little gem and a dressing of mustard and crème fraîche.

For the main there is ox liver, fiercely fried until crusted without but soft and wobbly inside, with prunes and chips and a rocket salad. Or have a slab of their slow roasted [Texel](https://texel.uk/) lamb, a beautiful shade of cotton candy pink, with borlotti beans and piles of peperonata, arranged in the deep well of the plate, as if trying to contain the joy. These dishes are also properly sauced, as if determined to ensure moppage with any sourdough that hasn’t already been used as a vehicle for the salty whipped butter. And oh joy, there’s a list of familiar-sounding wines, which appears to have been designed to enable drinking rather than exploring. Sometimes – sod it, most of the time – I don’t want my horizons expanded, I just want a nice glass of crisp white. That’s what I get: a bottle of arneis from Elvio Tintero. I liked it so much I took a detailed note. The charming waiter said it had a creamy end. I’m not going to argue.

The Palmerston supplies other restaurants in the city with bread and more proof of that baking skill comes with the desserts: a properly wobbly custard tart with a dollop of crème fraîche to brighten things up, and a deeply soothing gooseberry roulade with its own custard pond. I’m a big fan of custard ponds. It’s a great dessert. It’s a great dinner. It’s also the best time I’ve had in a former banking hall in a very long time.