# 111 by Modou, Glasgow: ‘A banging recipe for a great place’ – restaurant review

The innovative menu at 111 by Modou in Glasgow is really amazing. The story of its chef is pretty amazing, too

[**111 by Modou**](https://111bymodou.co.uk/)**, 111 Cleveden Road, Kelvinside, Glasgow G12 0JU (0141 334 0111). Total Trust menu (Sunday/Monday) £25, Explore menu (Thursday-Saturday) £40, wines from £23**

There’s one thing guaranteed to make a great restaurant experience even better: a great story. Glasgow’s [111 by Modou](https://111bymodou.co.uk/) has a terrific story. When rabid right-wingers, sodden with rhetoric, are attempting to cast all immigrants as feckless spongers, it’s one that needs to be told. Senegalese-born Modou Diagne spent much of his childhood in Spain. When he was 18, he came alone to Glasgow in search of something better. He had just £200 and at first slept rough. Eventually he found sanctuary in a church and then got into a hostel. In 2014, after a year of applications, he landed a job as a kitchen porter at 111 by Nico in Kelvinside.

The restaurant is part of the Six by Nico group, owned by chef Nico Simeone. They offer good-value tasting menus that change every six weeks, from sites across Scotland, England and now Ireland. Simeone quickly clocked Diagne’s work ethic. He progressed him through roles in the kitchen at speed, so that by 2018 he was head chef of 111 by Nico. In March 2020, Simeone summoned Diagne and told him he was changing the restaurant’s name to 111 by Modou. The place was his now. And if you want a good old cry, go to the restaurant’s [website](https://111bymodou.co.uk/) and watch the video of that moment.

Obviously, the pandemic intervened, during which Diagne cooked in a local church for vulnerable people in his community. Finally, in April 2021, his restaurant reopened. From Thursday to Saturday, they offer a five-course tasting menu at £40 a head. You choose a main ingredient at each course, list any allergies or major dislikes, and they do the rest. On Sundays and Mondays, however, they run the Total Trust menu. Again, you explain any allergies and dislikes. Then it just happens: five courses of extremely good, inventive cooking for a ludicrous £25 a head. You can have a £30 wine flight, or choose a bottle from the short wine list that starts at £23 and finishes at about £35. The Total Trust menu changes with each service depending on what’s available, which means the dishes pictured with this review will be different to those described in it. You’ll just have to trust me, as I did them.

If you’re a picky eater with the palate of an overindulged toddler, this is not for you. My companion only specified no cheese on their dishes. If you fancy, they will tell you exactly what you’re being served as each plate arrives, but there’s also a card on the table inviting you to “challenge your foodie senses and write what you can taste in each course”. Almost 30 years ago I went to a restaurant in London by the name of Aubergine where an obscure chef called Gordon Ramsay – whatever happened to him? – served a trio of crème brûlées, each flavoured with a different herb. The oleaginous maître d’ insisted we guess the flavour with an “aren’t we clever” smirk and a refusal to be drawn. It was bloody annoying. At those prices I only wanted lunch, not a parlour game.

This is wildly different. Our waiter is terrific at what becomes a shared venture, not an us-versus-them competition. When I tell him that the breadcrumbed and deep-fried meaty disc with dark dollops of sauce, served as an opening snack, is an oxtail croquette, probably with black garlic, he looks thrilled. Clever me. So, settle back into this gunmetal-grey velvet booth, put your elbows on the polished copper table and enjoy the ride.

The cooking is rich and layered and big on frothy, beautifully executed mousse-like emulsions which some might disparagingly call foams, as if it were proof that this whole restaurant lark is a racket. It isn’t, if it’s done well. My first dish is a heap of warm cheesy mousse, the colour of the best cheddar, dribbled with the brilliant green of chive oil and topped with the crunch of deep-fried crispy onions. It’s all the flavours of the very best packet of cheese and onion crisps in spoonable form. My companion gets a version made with a mousse of roasted squash.

That’s followed by a fat, silky raviolo of poached salmon. It looks like a creamy fedora as made by the White Company, and comes lubricated by a bowling lawn-green dill emulsion. Next come fillets of poached sole that have been rolled and sliced into a fat cylinder, their alabaster surface gently torched. There’s a frothy seafood bisque and, tucked underneath, lightly pickled mussels. It’s boosted by a layer of taramasalata, a soothing cauliflower purée and, for a little further acidity, diced pickled cucumber. Listed like this, it sounds complicated. It’s not. The sole is the star. The rest are merely supporting actors.

These days I take truly awful photographs of what I’ve eaten, partly to jog my addled memory and partly so I can post those dismal pictures to [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/jayrayner1/?hl=en) each Sunday, so that people there can be utterly appalled by my images. It’s only when I’ve cleared every last smudge of the meat course down to the glaze, that I realise I forgot to thumb my phone into life. What can I say? It was just too damn alluring: a layered piece of braised lamb belly, sliced through and then seared, with just the right amount of hot melting fat, a thick meaty jus and a parsnip purée. That’s all there is. And then it’s gone.

Dessert is a lipstick-pink strawberry sorbet with a lime and white chocolate mousse. Underneath is a layer of torched Italian meringue. On top are fragments of Swiss meringue. Did I work out what most of the things on each plate were without prompting? Well, yes, I did, but not because I’m a flavour ninja. It’s because they prepared each ingredient so it shouted its name. I was left with the sense of a kitchen which, having set a narrow frame for itself – just those five dishes – was having fun, but which had not lost sight of the importance of us having fun, too. I’ve rolled my eyes recently at the viral spread of tasting menus. But five courses like this, offered at such a delightful price, simply can’t outstay its welcome. Throw in the delicious story of Modou Diagne, who worked his damnedest to get to where he is, and you have a banging recipe for a great restaurant. I put my total trust in him and his team. I would happily do so again.