

Tapas dancing

Small portions and numerous options... Brindisa's Spanish bar is a must for foodaholics who struggle to make up their mind, says **Jay Rayner**

Tapas Brindisa, 18-20 Southwark Street, London SE1 (020 8772 1613, no bookings taken). Meal for two, £40-£80

In restaurants, chefs take raw ingredients, for which they had to pay less than you would. They prepare them and sell them to you at higher prices than you would normally pay. Marketing men call this process 'adding value'. Generally we do not think about it. But at Tapas Brindisa, a new restaurant at London's Borough Market, the mechanics of adding value are at times so marginal it is impossible not to consider them.

Brindisa is a highly regarded importer of Spanish produce. If you have eaten great chorizo in a British restaurant recently, or nibbled at a bowl of salted almonds, chances are the supplier was Brindisa. As well as doing enormous restaurant trade they also have a couple of retail outlets. And now Tapas Brindisa, which is just what it sounds like: a restaurant where you can eat the great ingredients you might otherwise have to serve yourself at home. It is, appropriately enough, a relaxed place. There's a bar to one side for the drinking of sherry and the nibbling of Joselito ham, plus tables for a more considered ransacking of the menu.

One part of the menu lists 'fine food from a tin' and it is exactly that: lovely cured or smoked anchovies from Ortiz, smoked mackerel and yellow-fin tuna. They don't literally feed it to you from the tin, student style, but it's really not far off that. Here's where the economics kick in. A plate of nine darling little anchovy fillets costs £8. At Brindisa a tin containing 10 fillets retails at £2.75. It is fair to

ONE PART OF THE MENU LISTS 'FINE FOOD FROM A TIN' AND IT IS JUST THAT: CURED ANCHOVIES FROM ORTIZ, SMOKED MACKEREL AND YELLOW-FIN TUNA



Market beater: from Brindisa to Borough

assume they pay half that wholesale, so £1.40. That's a 14p fillet marked up to 90p. Which they then put on a plate. Ouch.

I don't want to obsess about this too much because the food really is as good as it gets for tapas: the rich slices of ham served warm as they should be; hunks of savoury salt cod in crispy batter with aioli and country bread; ditto chargrilled squid; chunky fried king prawns with a boost of chilli and garlic; deep-fried Monte Enebro cheese with a sticky dribble of honey. Putting aside the famed Brindisa grilled chorizo, which was undercooked, I really can recommend the food. But not the prices, which felt about 25 per cent over the odds for what is essentially browsing market food.

I don't recall any piped music, thank god, which can be a total horror, particularly during this, the pre-Christmas period. Still, restaurateurs do like it and, as I have to listen to it, let me plead: if you insist upon playing something festive this year please make it *Christmas Decorations*, gorgeous jazz trio reworkings of Christmas carols by the pianist Joe Thompson, a well-kept secret who's so good he was picked by Elvis Costello and Diana Krall to play at their wedding. Recommendations don't come much better than that. **OM**

jay.rayner@observer.co.uk