

» Restaurant review

Labyrinth hotel could do with a guiding hand

After wandering the Landmark's endless corridors in search of food, **Joseph Connolly** finds the chef seems to have lost his way a bit too

» The Landmark Hotel is a vast Victorian pile opposite Marylebone Station – though let's face it: it's not, in truth, very much of a landmark at all, because few really know where it is, what it's called or even what it looks like. Here is one of London's 5-star hotels – but I'm telling you, matey: you've never been in a 5-star hotel that's remotely like this one. For starters, the main entrance appears to be the side one: no foyer to speak of, but a long marble corridor leading to a loftily grand though still very dim, heavy and intimidatingly lowering seating area, hard by the reception desk. Which, at 8.15 on a weekday evening, was completely unmanned. Maybe because the whole of the space was devoid of all humanity, and they didn't want to squander personnel. So my wife and I wandered about a bit in search of the lesser of the two restaurants here, called twotwentytwo: howannoyingisthat? The address is 222 Marylebone Road, you see, and so it's called twotwentytwo – something James Joyce and E.E. Cummings might jointly have come up with, one drunken afternoon.

Ballrooms

And so we're still padding along these endless and deserted thick-carpeted corridors, in search of either a human being or the restaurant, whichever comes first. There are lots of ballrooms hosting Rep of the Year sort of ceremonies – one such in full swing: I caught a glimpse of purple uplift curtains and the blurred announcement that Barry had just won a bottle of Prosecco ...! Yay – let's all hear it for Barry! Then we stumbled across the very impressive Winter Garden – an amazing internal covered terrace the full height of the hotel, and studded with palm trees. But this is the blindingly expensive restaurant (cappuccino £6.10, enough



■ **Joseph Connolly at twotwentytwo at the Landmark Hotel in Marylebone**

said) and we were after the one that with a bit of luck would by the end of the evening leave us still at least partially sighted. Eventually I saw a person with a badge, whom I asked for directions: he stared at me briefly, and then he ran away. Then I saw another, who wordlessly escorted us along two more corridors and then down a marble staircase that led to another great yawning void containing only a life-size model of a horse with a lampshade on its head: and so suddenly, here we are – twotwentytwo: letjoybeunconfined.

It's billed as a Restaurant & Bar (upper case, naturally) and that's half the trouble: diners are mingled amid drinkers, and it's not a happy blend. Next to us was a man quite successfully getting an extremely talkative girl well on the way to legless, though her eye would keep straying towards the

pricey menu: "Don't feel you have to eat anything ...!" he said to her repeatedly. The room is dominated by a twelve foot dark oak mantel and panelling – the high Victorian take on Jacobean, and a bit like the set of a Hammer Horror – while the drippy and gauzy chandeliers are akin to those much favoured by oligarchs and despots, bestowing a light that is not so much soft as dismal. The staff comprises an assortment of eager and smiling young girls who are as much professional waitresses as I am a Premier League footballer. Your coats are taken not to a cloakroom but to a peg in the corner by this sweet little child who tells you that she doubts that they'll be stolen. So as I say – all that's half the trouble: the other half is the food. When I placed the order, a different sweet child said "That's brilliant!" and I agreed that

it was, while modestly adding that I have, of course, done this before. Though never before have I seen bog standard Atlantic prawns billed as 'baby' prawns, as if they were an elite. The resultant cocktail was a joke: icy cold in not a Marie Rose as advertised, but commercial mayonnaise: more lettuce than anything. My wife had 'glazed figs' and Parma ham. Both were eventually to be found lurking beneath a landslide of rocket – the figs quite unglazed, the ham very thick and hard and fatty. And for an extra £8, we both could have tucked into rustic bread (as opposed to urban bread) and olive oil.

Rocket

Then my wife had grilled fillets of lemon sole with fennel, asparagus ... and rocket. God – they must have had a glut of the stuff that night, for here was a veritable Primrose Hill of

it: four small pieces of okay fish loitering shyly beneath, and no asparagus whatever. And I, like the fool I am, ordered the (£16!) 'hand made' Angus burger with mature cheddar and sweet cure bacon. "How would you like it?" giggled the girl. "Well – I want it pink and juicy. So medium? Or medium rare, do you think?" "Mm – I think somewhere in between: medium to medium rare, I'd say." Yes. And when it arrived after one hell of a while, it was very well done, wasn't it? Yes of course it was. Which I pointed out. "We can do another one!" brightly volunteered the infant. Yes but what is the point of a detailed conversation about the whole bleeding thing and then it's wrong and then you do it all over again and I wait another half an hour ...? So I ate half of it. It tasted as if I imagine would all of that thick carpet in the corridors. The

chips were hard inside and the flavour was of the rather old oil in which they had been not deeply enough fried. The ketchup was in a small saucerless bowl, with no spoon. Oh God ...

And then the sweet little girl confided that her favourite pudding was the warm chocolate fondant with vanilla ice cream. Well you hate to slap down a puppy, don't you? So we had one of those. Now normally, as you know, a fondant is turned out after cooking, the ice cream alongside. This was presented still in the bowl it was baked in, the scoop atop it. Which of course immediately melted into the warmth of the fondant, rendering it all a rather lumpy and milky goo: a shame, because it hadn't at all been a bad fondant, to start off with. I got the bill: they didn't charge for the burger. I've lost track of how many burgers this year I have ordered in both hope and hunger that have turned out to be hopelessly wrong, and then not charged for: just for once, I'd quite like to eat a really good one, and then pay money for it.

So I thought we'd go now – and with a whoop of delight we were informed that our coats had not in fact been stolen ...! bloodygoodnews.

■ **All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk.**

FACTFILE

- **twotwentytwo**
Landmark Hotel
222 Marylebone Road, NW1
Tel: 020-7631 8000
- Open Mon-Fri 11.30am – 12pm.
Sat 3 – 11pm.
- Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★☆☆☆
(for eagerness, if not execution)
- The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆☆
- Cost: About £115 for modest three course meal for two with wine.

faces a battle for funding

had to cut £80,000 of the Calthorpe's funding.

"Where before we acted like a charity, we now have to be entrepreneurs. We've got to start charging where before we were free," says Gates.

The project is trying other ways to raise funds, including a Christmas auction on November 30.

And kind-hearted locals have helped. Someone passing by saw the sign about the funding shortfall and so arranged a quiz at their local pub in support of the Calthorpe.

"I don't know what I would do without the Calthorpe," says Chadli. "It would be a big loss if it closed. I'd be devastated."

■ **The Calthorpe Project is hosting a Christmas Auction on November 30 at 6.30pm. Call 020-7837 8019. Follow Justin Kary on Twitter @ jwkary.**

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■ **The project, a registered charity, runs a drop-in childcare service and also offers a sports pitch, gardening, opportunities for volunteering and a range of classes**