

The ViewLondon Review

Review by Amelia Dale 06/02/2012

Naming your restaurant after the famous La Boqueria food market in Barcelona certainly raises expectations. Thankfully Brixton's Bouqueria reaches them with aplomb, offering some of the best tapas London has to offer.

The Venue

The venue is equidistant from both Brixton and Clapham, so attracts tapas fans from both areas. Looks wise, Boqueria is very different from much of Brixton's burgeoning food scene, swapping the borrowed furniture and chintzy look for a more minimal chic. Neutral tones adorn the walls, and gorgeous wooden tables and simple chairs make for a comfortable, relaxed setting. In true Spanish style there is a long bar with seats for those needing a quick nibble with drinks, where you can chat to the barman and friends with the main restaurant tucked away and out of earshot. Airy skylights, candles and tasteful decoration make for a really lovely and authentic dining experience.

The Atmosphere

Considering the venue is somewhat out of the way (it's a bit of a trek from the tube) it's a good sign that it is busy, with large groups of people arriving to eagerly accept their bookings. The bar is certainly well-propped too, with a trendy, upmarket clientele that's clearly traveled to enjoy this hot new spot.

The staff are excellent and really help to make the evening special; from the chef (straight from Andalucia) who comes and welcomes his guests, to the friendly barman and a brilliant head waitress, who is bubbly, friendly and full of helpful pointers about the best things on the menu.

The Food

The tapas on offer at Boqueria is certainly some of the best in London. Orders come out when they're ready, so order as much as you can stomach and enjoy little waves of delicious dishes brought to the table. Things kicks off well with marinated olives that are plump delights a far cry from those served in other venues happier to pedal fare of lesser quality. A mixture of the speciality Spanish hams also impresses, with succulent, meaty and melt-in-the-mouth jamón alongside queso manchego cheese and a mixture of excellent grilled breads. It says a lot about a restaurant when even its selection of bread is of a high standard, not least the tomato-bread, slathered in chunks of sweet tomato, garlic and oil, before being grilled to perfection.

A mixture of croquetas continue the excellent impression, filled with rich blue cheese or Serrano ham, they're mouth-wateringly delicious. The calamares a la romana are also a hit, leaving behind the thick, glutenous batter of lesser restaurants and replacing it with the lightest of touches, alongside a well-balanced lemon mayonnaise. The grilled langoustines are thick, plump, juicy, sweet and downright delicious, and the huevos rotos con chorizo y setas also a must-try - this very faithful version of Spanish style 'broken' eggs with chorizo and mushrooms might sound simple but it tastes incredible. There are three types of very impressive paella, as well as authentic tortilla de patatas that are light and a perfect partner for the spicy salsa. The confit of cod is a revelation, as is the cochinillo de manzana, a fatty slice of pork belly served with crisp sorbet, parsnip crisps and apple sauce.

Dessert shouldn't be missed either, with very special mention going to the crema Catalana (caramelised creamy custard - the Catalan version of a creme caramel, or Cambridge burnt cream). It's rich, laced with vanilla and boasts a perfectly crisp topping that cracks satisfyingly under the drop of a spoon.

The Drink

Allow the friendly hostess to guide you through the drinks menu and you should be well pleased. Bouqueria's speciality sherry, Manzanilla, is a fascinating fino sherry from Cádiz in Andalusia, and a very good place at which to start. It's wonderfully dry but slips down all too easily, and is a pretty impressive aperitif. There is a very good selection of quality wine on offer, with mark ups that seem very reasonable indeed. The Muga Blanco Rioja is a good bet for many of the seafood choices, and is still robust enough to stand up to some of the heartier options - so a good all rounder.

The Last Word

Boqueria is a must-visit for those hankering after an authentic taste of Spain. From the atmosphere to the delicious food and excellent wines, this really is how it's meant to be done.