

# By 'eck, it's good

**Opus One Restaurant  
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Vimto, Eccles cake and Manchester tart on the menu? The setting of Opus One is super stylish but by 'eck, there's no doubt which city this restaurant is in

REVIEW BY RAY KING

The first time I walked into the Radisson Edwardian Hotel's flagship Opus One Restaurant my jaw dropped. I don't know what I was expecting – some musical theme perhaps, after all, the Free Trade Hall had been the home of the Hallé for a century – but not this. Not the red lights, the black lacquer furnishing and the oriental atmosphere, complete with statuary.

Was this really the heartbeat of Manchester, where much of the city's history had been played out? On the site of Peterloo and in the halls where the radical Victorian anti-Corn Law Leaguers had challenged governments. Where Bob Dylan has been branded 'traitor' for strumming an electric guitar and where I'd been transfixed by Deborah Harry? Or had I been transmuted to Singapore, Bangkok or

Hong Kong? Beam me up, Scotty!

I'd known the Free Trade Hall since my school speech days were staged there in the 1950s but when controversy raged over its future after the Hallé moved out I was broadly in favour of it becoming a hotel. What else could it be used for? And besides, Luftwaffe incendiaries had left only one and a half walls standing; the rest was pretty much an austerity rebuild whose sell-by date had come.

Over time I've grown used to Opus One and if that startling decor still seems out of place, the restaurant menu is now gratifyingly rooted in classic British food sourced from excellent local ingredients handled with aplomb and presented with panache.

Opus One is not the place for a quiet dinner. On a Tuesday night it was buzzing with animated conversation from the stylish bar at one end of the vast room echoing from all those

lacquered surfaces and the music was just about on the right side of intrusive. Liveliness, however, is preferable to sepulchral silence and anyway, Manchester doesn't really do silence.

We began with complimentary amuse bouches of dainty smoked salmon croquettes with dill butter cream before getting stuck into the starters proper. My hand dived scallops with fresh peas, lettuce and lobster dressing (£10.25), elegantly presented in rectangular glass platter, were just so; plump, fleshy and delicately flavoured. Mrs K chose tea smoked venison with carpaccio and cappuccino of increasingly fashionable beetroot – the new rhubarb? - foie gras rosti and pancetta crackling (£8.65). The dish looked stunning and the sweetness of the beet worked well with the gamey smokiness of the venison; the rosti was probably one component too many.

When a menu's main courses feature

promising fish dishes, we are invariably hooked and Opus One's turbot and halibut provided tempting bait. I chose the former, a thick, sweet, perfectly cooked tranche of the king of flatfish served with salty lemon samphire and a delightful pot containing a layered "lasagne" of Cornish crab (£22.95). Delicious. Mrs K's generously proportioned fillet of succulent steamed halibut came with seared squid, squid ink dressing and a pressing of flavourful creamed brown shrimps and potatoes (£20.95). Our side orders of honey roasted root vegetables and silky red onion mashed potatoes, both very good, added £3 a pop.

We rounded off by sharing a cleverly conceived, witty 'Taste of Manchester' dessert comprising iced Vimto parfait, warm Eccles cake, mini Manchester tart, Vimto smoothie and clotted cream (£6.85). And you don't get that in Singapore. ■