



The Scoffer

Our girl heads to Guesthouse West for some Hollywood glamour

There's a touch of Hollywood about Guesthouse West at night, its quoin-edged façade bathed in a blaze of floodlight, almost as though a movie premiere were underway. There's no red carpet out front, just an expanse of decking, stretching beneath over-sized, cream parasols, but the cinematic flavour lingers on within, particularly when the sound system's delivering Sinatra. Old posters ('Days of Sin & Nights of Nymphomania', or Don Dorsey's 'Love and Kisses. Cheri... she's an expert in the most exciting sport of all!') seem in tune with one of the house cocktails (the 'Porn Star', £10), though there is also a medley of six martinis and assorted mojitos at £8.

It's these – and GHW's 20 double-rooms – that have claimed attention in the three years since it opened, which may partly explain why its website so understates its culinary attractions: 'We don't expect you to have every meal at Guesthouse West, in fact we positively encourage you to eat out and explore the area.' Or perhaps it's because that was written a few years B.E ('Before Eri') that is, their Albanian head chef, six years in the UK but only a couple of months at GHW.

Too young to have experienced the full Stalinist glory of the Enver Hoxha regime, Eri appears to have emerged perfectly equipped to pander to the capitalist pigs of the West. Cream of celeriac soup (£4.50), selected from the 'Terrace menu' (as opposed to the 'Parlour menu' which offers steak sandwiches, burgers and grazing plates), arrived swirling with orange crescents – paprika-infused olive oil, strained through a coffee filter. The Accomplice pronounced it excellent, and was unable to fault the blatantly fresh ciabatta at its side. Haddock fish cake with a chive butter sauce (£7.50) was even better, the haddock convincingly enhanced by

'I COULD EAT
HERE EVERY
NIGHT'

gherkins, capers, bay leaves and peppercorns, the sauce a light but intense distillation of lemon, shallots, white wine, vinegar, and cream.

By then, we had settled inside, in leather chairs, caramel in colour, which proved corruptingly comfortable, a nice antidote to the slightly prosaic bar (if ever a youth hostel had a bar, this might be it).

Glasses of an Oz rosé (Riddle Cabernet Grenache, £5, or £20-a-bottle) and a Transatlantic Pinot Noir (Estancia, Pinnacles, Monterey, £5 a glass, £20-a-bottle) eased us into butterfly tarragon chicken breast, crushed new potatoes, green beans Lyonnaise, (£14.50), whose sole deficiency lay in an accompanying plum tomato salad (£4) which seemed more frisee and onion than tomato, and lacked any discernible dressing, though the perfection of the chicken-potato-bean trio could not be questioned.

Scottish rib-eye, sautéed black cap mushrooms and fries (£18) had the Accomplice growling and howling with lupine pleasure, and expressing not necessarily coherent approval for the fact that the beef had been hung for 28 days, and joy that its impressive vintage was matched by its volume, while not neglecting praise for fries which had been crafted with NASA-precision.

A petite panacotta, in a puddle of forest fruits coulis (£5) came speckled with vanilla. Irreproachable: as our Romanian waitress promised it would be.

The menu changes roughly every two months. But one fixture now threatens. 'This is the food people want,' announced the Accomplice as we left. 'I could eat here every night.'

£35 a head. Guesthouse West, 163–165 Westbourne Grove, W11 020 7792 9800; www.guesthousewest.com