



Portal Restaurant & Bar ★

88 St John Street, EC1

Tel: 020 7253 6950 Price: £31

We hear that one of the backers of this new Clerkenwell venture, owned by ex-Café du Marché front-of-house Antonio Correia, is an architect – and it shows. The spectacular conservatory that previously hosted Café Lazeez's formal dining room has been opened up so that the bar and dining areas form a more unified space, where exposed vents, cool lighting and sleek modern furniture create an edgy, urban look, while an open kitchen adds theatrics and buzz.

The food is good, too, and customers can choose between petiscos (Portuguese tapas) at the bar – think superior sliced meats, clams with piri piri sauce and octopus, parsley and coriander salad – or more formal modern Euro dining in the restaurant. Head chef Ricardo Costa is from Portugal but arrived in London via the two-Michelin-starred El Girasol in Alicante and his menus carry influences from across southern Europe.

There's plenty to please fish lovers –

delicate slivers of lobster in caviar-speckled cream sauce were divine and there's always at least one type of bacalhau (salt cod) on the menu – but the number one dish at the moment is without question the braised bisero (a cross between black pig and wild boar), which is marinated in red wine for a whole day, then cooked at low temperatures for another, arriving at the table so tender that a mere poke of the knife makes the generous cut fall apart.

To round things off, there's a decent dessert selection, but given the generous pricing of the fine selection of port, you may want to finish with cheese.

WINE LIST PORTAL

A fine, varied list that majors on European wine. There is an eclectic range under £30 before the established classics take over for those with cash to burn. There are 15 by the glass and an understandable nod towards Portugal in the red section. **White:** 2003 Pinot Blanc 'Barriques', Domaine Ostertag, Alsace, France, £27. **Red:** 2003 Casa Castillio 'Vendimia', Jumilla, Spain, £20.