

# GOOD CLEAN fun

## Barfly

ED POWER



### Alfie Byrne's

EARLSFORT TERRACE, DUBLIN 2

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**W**hen the first thing you see upon approaching a new bar is a ping-pong table in the window, it seems safe to leap to several assumptions. You can expect the place to be crawling with h\*\*psters, table tennis being the ironic pastime du jour of the bearded/retro push-bike set.

Also, the tunes are going to be 'edgy' — by which we mean James Blake rather than Pixies — and the beer menu will be a cornucopia of high-alcohol obscurities. Well, *Barfly* was correct on one count, at any rate, as we descended on Alfie Byrne's, a new opening from the crew behind *Against The Grain* and *Brew Dock*.

As anticipated, the selection of brews was beyond vast, with lots of quality Irish lagers and ales and many, many American imports (may we here inquire why the British vogue for low-alcohol content craft brews has not spread to Ireland?). However, the other two constituents of the triumvirate of the edgy Irish dive bar 2014 were strikingly absent: there was no music and a lack of hipsters.

Rather, the sprawling premises was heavily populated with business men (and it was overwhelmingly men) tucking into lunch and having what sounded like strictly off the record work conversations. (they all seemed to be speaking into their sleeves).

The contrast between the somewhat stodgy clientele and Alfie Byrne's trying-slightly-too-hard affectations was striking (in addition to the ping-pong table there was, of course, a selection of Jenga type games). Then, by pairing up with the Conrad Hotel, of which this is the on-site bar, the *Against The Grain* organisation is arguably venturing into uncharted territory. We KNOW fashionable 20 and 30 somethings are all for craft brews.



**Uncharted territory:** Alfie Byrne's is quite a departure for its posh landlord, the Conrad Hotel. A great place to eat and drink coffee as well as sample the dazzling selection of brews

Will their parents sign up?

*Barfly* was reminded of a recent visit to *Brew Dock*, where a table of salty 'auld Dubs' were softly, but not exactly politely, haranguing the barman over the absence of a certain Diageo-brewed stout. He pointed out that there were plenty of Irish owned stouts on tap — but they just couldn't make the leap. The generation gap was too vast. They wanted Guinness, plain and simple — no limited edition winter brew with notes of chrysanthemum and elderberry would suffice.

Then, at lunchtime at any rate, nobody was in Alfie Byrne's to guzzle booze. This was

strictly a 'good clean fun' crowd. As we drifted through the bar, seeking a free table but also trying to get a sense of the essence of the place, all we could see were people tucking into the better sort of pub food, topped off with a post prandial coffee.

If Alfie Byrne's isn't quite the full dive bar — it's pretty bright, the punters too blandly turned out — it is, at least, a likable approximation of the real thing. More than that, it considerably widens the options in a stretch of Dublin historically underserved by decent boozers. This is an exciting addition to the capital's drinking landscape.

## FINER DETAILS

### BLING FACTOR

The Conrad is a well appointed hotel and, compared to its somewhat strait-laced landlord, Alfie Byrne's feels like something from a different universe. It's respectably turned out and all that but the look is 100 per cent vintage. Those who are looking for gleaming modernity are better off idling by the silver fountain at nearby Earlsfort Plaza.

### TOILETS

We just popped our heads around the corner but

no noxious fumes knocked us sideways so the loos are fine.

### SERVICE

Enthusiastic and helpful — and not in the least snooty (this being part of an upmarket hotel, we'd had our doubts).

### DRINKS

One of the best selections of craft beers in Dublin — and certainly in this stretch of town.