

The Bothy: Eat and drink like the Scots

Haggis, steak and mushroom pie and a wealth of whisky choices on the menu at The Bothy

By Mike McCall, Edmonton Journal January 13, 2010



The Bothy, a new restaurant on Calgary Trail, provides a cosy respite from winter with a short menu of flavourful foods and an impressive wine and whisky list.

Photograph by: Larry Wong, edmontonjournal.com

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I am always on the lookout for new food experiences. I figure there is usually a good reason why people eat odd things, and it's not for the vitamins.

So I was excited when I found out about The Bothy, a new restaurant that offers a type of food with a reputation as one of the most bizarre in the West: haggis, a mix of minced sheep's organs, oatmeal, spices and stock encased in a sheep's stomach and boiled.

Unfortunately, I had to wait for my introduction to the "Great chieftain o' the puddin-race," as the poet Robert Burns called it, since on my first visit, The Bothy had run out. The popularity of the dish did encourage me, though, as did my experience that evening.

The Bothy's menu is short, so I was able to sample most of it in looking for a haggis alternative. Several items play on the new/old food trend of charcuterie and cheese platters. My companion and I chose a few meats and cheeses, the star of which was the roquefort, in my opinion, though my partner was enamoured with the smoked cheddar. The accompanying bread was only partially sliced, which I thought was bizarre and a little awkward, especially if I hadn't known the person I was dining with that well. Still, we enjoyed the variety of garnishes, including jams, some mustard and even an excellent pesto. The mixing and matching kept the flavours fresh.

The sharing style works well for The Bothy, which has a kitchen, but is more focused on being a wine and whisky bar. **It boasts the first Enomatic wine storage system in an Edmonton restaurant, which prevents open wine from oxidizing, allowing the restaurant to offer dozens of wines by the glass.** (The wine store VinoMania, at 11452 Jasper Ave., has had the system for months, and Hardware Grill has a similar one.)

Though I was tempted to learn more about wine by indulging in the broad selection, I opted to stick with the Scottish theme and have whisky. I didn't count, but the choices seem even broader, with more than 50 types for \$6 to \$60 a glass.

But it was the pies, which make up the bulk of the menu, that really sold me on The Bothy. The crust of my steak and mushroom pie was firm and buttery, and the sauce was delicious. It was a hearty dish perfect for the weather.

On the side, I got the soup of the day, a chunky tomato that was almost like a puree. It was a bit spicy, with chunks of bacon that added depth to the tartness of the tomatoes. It was topped with a bit of pesto and was a nice alternative to the more common cream-of-tomato soups.

The service during this visit, and upon my return for haggis, is best described as uneven. My peeves: waitresses not knowing what's on the menu and appearing infrequently. They were well-meaning and friendly, though, typical of newly opened restaurants, so I won't hold anything against The Bothy.

Braced by a 25-year-old Longmorn, I was ready for my haggis. It was much milder than I expected, and the oatmeal combined with the meat to give it a nutty flavour. It was a small serving compared with the pies, but aside from that, I enjoyed it and would get it again.

A bothy is a basic travellers' hut, and this one lives up to its name, providing a cosy respite from winter. There was some unevenness in the food and service, but nothing The Bothy can't overcome.

For some, the food will just be a backdrop, but if great pies, wine and whisky are what you're after, this is the place.

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