



pub

JONATHAN TREW DELVES INTO THE DARK SIDE OF VICE AND FINDS SOME DEVILISH DRINKS

MAYBE The Lord Of The Rings has been getting to me but it looks as though the forces of evil are pitching up for a square go with the forces of good in Edinburgh.

OK, evil and good are putting it a bit strong. But judging by their names, two bars in Edinburgh's West End look set to battle it out for customers' hearts, souls and – more importantly – wallets.

On the side of the angels is Halo, the stylish cocktail bar we reviewed here last year.

Over in the dark corner with a devilish grin on its face is the more recently opened Vice.

Like being asked if you would like your tea, Vice isn't the first thing you associate with Edinburgh. As the once-genteel George Street has let down its hair and become party central, Vice hopes to make the West End naughty but nice.

In keeping with its sinful name, Vice is a basement bar that lurks just out of sight on Shandwick Place – a mere pitchfork-toss from Halo.

The first thing that strikes you as you venture down the stairs to the entrance is that the place seems to glow with a cold blue light.

A bank of ultra violet lamps by the door cast a chilly gleam on everything. While it might look very inviting on a hot summer's night, it doesn't scream welcome in the depths of a Scottish winter.

It certainly seemed to have scared off most would-be sinners as there was only one other couple in apart from us at the back of eight on a Tuesday night.

Vice is the sort of place that needs a crowd to work. Traditional bars can get away with a couple of old men and their dogs dotted about the joint. Vice can't.

It is clinically modern but

without a scrum of punters giving it some va-va-voom it can be a bit like looking into an empty fridge.

It is basically split into two main areas. In front of the bar is a series of concrete and leather benches and tables. It's all very functional and trendy but looks rather cold and bare thanks to the UV lights.

To the side of the bar is a warmer, feeling area with a red wall and cube seats arranged around a large table. In between the two spaces are the DJ box and a sort of No Man's Land cum mini-dancefloor that is criss-crossed by red searchlights.

It is very bold and striking, but unless there's a crowd in you can't help but feel a bit isolated – like you've been stuck in solitary in some prison.

So it was a relief when about 40 people all piled in shortly afterwards and injected a huge dose of atmosphere.

Fast forward to a Friday night, a few more drinks and a few more punters and you could see how people might get a taste for Vice.

The bar is owned by a local musician who goes under the single name of Raff. DJs play around the weekends, but even the CD that was on when we were there proved that the Devil has the best tunes.

The cocktails read a bit like the seven deadly sins.

The Bling champagne cocktail could be pride. The Rich Bitch rum pitchers would be envy and avarice is represented by the Moneyshot shooters. Sloth is what you feel the next day after too many Last Chance tequila cocktails.

As to whether Halo or Vice will win out, I expect they will co-exist quite happily. Halo will continue to attract a slightly older, perhaps more cash-rich crowd and Vice will pull in younger thrill seekers who – like the ageing rockers AC/DC – reckoned that Hell ain't a bad place to be.



Dressing the plate: The chef puts the finishing touches to another tasty treat



Tam Cowan

BIT of a football theme today, folks, in the wake of last week's Old Firm clash at Parkhead.

Hard on the heels of Celtic's 3-0 win over bitter rivals Rangers, two possible venues immediately sprung to mind.

The Italian restaurant in Dumfries that Hoops midfielder Stilian Petrov recently raved about in the papers – or the Glasgow hotel which played host in midweek to the Ibrox squad's end of season dinner.

A quick toss of the coin and it was down the M74 to Pizzeria Il Fiume. Probably the best option as, let's face it, there were only so many jokes I could have cracked about mince, dumplings and over-priced turkeys.

Anyway, Petrov recently revealed his recipe for success – special meals delivered to his door from this restaurant 80 miles away.

The Bulgarian loves the low calorie, low cholesterol dishes provided by the owner Milan Cveticovic who first met Petrov when he ran a different restaurant in Glasgow.

As the Celtic star said: "When he moved to Dumfries he continued to make meals for me and he delivers them twice a week."

Hang on a minute, Stan. You get the stuff delivered? From Dumfries? I presume you give the driver a decent tip? And surely you have the good grace not to complain too strongly if the grub's not exactly piping hot?

Anyway, it sounded worth checking out, although you'll forgive me if I ignore all that stuff about low calorie, low cholesterol dishes.

I'm not a keen sportsman, you see – okay, I do enjoy the odd game of pocket billiards – and I've always maintained there's only one way to eat healthily in an Italian bistro. Yes, that's right, always remember to have your pizza cut into four slices instead of eight.

From the outside, Pizzeria Il Fiume is an incredibly modest looking joint. Located on the outskirts of a dimly-lit residential area, it's a stone's throw from some public lavatories.

However, it's extremely smart inside – in a warm and cosy sort of way – and I must say I found this quite surprising.

After all, as those of you who've followed Petrov's career at Paradise will appreciate, I assumed he'd have gone for a dive.

I always like a restaurant where they take your coats at the door – and prepare to have your nostrils tantalised by the aromas wafting from the huge log oven. This is manned by two chefs who used those extended shovels to slide pizzas in and out of the furnace.

Don't know if the job pays well, but I'll bet neither of them will ever have to waste any money down at the sunbed salon. According

EATING OUT: Pizzeria Il Fiume



A taste

CELTIC STAR STAN PETROV INSPIRES TAM TO SEEK OUT THE PERFECT PIZZA JOINT IN DUMFRIES

to the mouth-watering menu, a few of the meat dishes are also cooked in this manner.

Mind you, when Stilian visited with a few of his team-mates recently and Bobo Balde was asked how he'd like his steak, I understand the big man replied: "Rare".

Anyway, I began my evening with a first-class cappuccino. Fantastic coffee, but listen – considering I still hadn't nibbled on a single morsel of food, how come it arrived at my table with a couple of After Eights?

Sweeties before dinner? If that's the case, surely it should have been a Milky Way. Well, if memory serves, you can eat one of those before a meal without ruining your appetite.

And here's something else I always find baffling about Italian bistros – how come they always insist on providing you with far too many sugar sachets with your tea or coffee?

I don't even take sugar with my hot drinks,

A world of

wines

Want to know more about the world of wine? If you're inspired by exotic-sounding names, but don't know the first thing about grapes and vineyards, pour yourself a glass and let the experts from the Daily Record Wine Club lead you on a trip around the globe.

ONCE it took two minutes in the supermarket to browse and choose a bottle of wine.

These days there are so many types on the shelves, it's bamboozling.

By starting with the basics, we hope to make buying and drinking wine more enjoyable. The most important part of learning about wines is to sit down and enjoy a glass.

Even if the grapes are picked from the same vine in the same vineyard in consecutive years, flavours and aromas are affected differently by the sun, rain,

Vice

9 Shandwick Place,
Edinburgh

Telephone: 0131 228 9147

Open: noon-1am, seven days

Food: noon-8pm, seven days

Drinks: Pint Tennents £2.70;

bottled beers £2.80;

glass of wine from £3.50;

shooters £2.50;

cocktails from £4.50

Rating: Three out of five

