



Right on cue

Q Grill

The big smoke gets yet another barbecue restaurant, this time in Camden

Keeping his foot on the pedal after the launches of Holborn Dining Room in February and upmarket chippie The Fish & Chip Shop last year, Des McDonald is back with yet another new restaurant. This time it's Q Grill, a southern US grill-style format in Camden that blends traditional Memphis smokehouse flavours with South American and Asian influences.

McDonald has had an impressive career. Starting at The Ritz at the age of 17, he went on to become head chef of The Ivy and CEO of Caprice Holdings, where he stayed for 20 years. But in 2012 he opted to part company with the Scott's and J Sheekey owner and set up his own restaurant empire. And it seems to be coming along very nicely.

At Q Grill he has now turned his hand to

meat and seafood cooked in a charcoal pit grill rather than a deep-fat fryer - that's a reference to The Fish & Chip Shop and not Holborn Dining Room, we hasten to add - with a wide-ranging menu designed to leave no hot coal unturned. McDonald is joined at Q Grill by Lee Bull as executive chef and Scott McCaig as general manager. Bull was former head chef at The Ivy, Le Caprice and Scott's, and opened the back-of-house operations at The Fish & Chip Shop last year. Head chef is Phil Eagle, formerly of Hix and Le Caprice.

Dishes range from 'counter' fare - butternut squash 'hummus' and charred flatbread; sea bass ceviche with spicy plantain; and a bag of barbecued Cornish hens' wings (available in two sizes) - to meaty salads: hickory chicory; spiced shrimp cocktail; and hickory hot smoked salmon and horseradish. However, it is the grill section where the eye inevitably wanders from the outset.

Here the choice ranges from the burger, which boldly comes with the addition of avocado; a half or whole rack of Jospers ribs; grass-fed strip loin; and a half or whole pit-roast chicken with garlic and lemon. For those happy to share, there are also two 'boards' on offer, one fish, one meat.

Desserts, meanwhile, include root-beer and Coke floats; pit-grilled pineapple lime sorbet; and banoffee cheesecake. There's

also a selection of US bourbons and whiskeys, local Camden beers and cocktails such as the 'Rum DMC' on the rocks.

If it ended there, Q Grill might be seen as just one more barbecue restaurant in a sector that is often more smoke than fire. But it is McDonald's attention to detail - and indeed the designer he chooses, in this case Alexander Waterworth Interiors - that make this restaurant more than just an also-ran.

Admittedly, the split-level dining room has a touch of the Riding House Café/Pizza East about it, but from a design perspective this is no bad thing. The interior has a laid-back feel, with rough timbers, warm lighting and an inviting bar that takes centre stage at the 125-cover venue and where wooden mallets take the place of beer tap handles. The raised section is part-private dining room/part-overflow area that will no doubt be the location for numerous Christmas parties once the season begins.

Q Grill also recognises the growing trend for takeaway (see *Take me out*, p32) with an impressive takeaway menu that features everything from its spiced shrimp cocktail, fried chicken, kielbasa hotdog and soft shell crab to steak and chips and scrumpy-fried onions. There is also a special Sunday brunch menu, giving customers even more reasons to give it a whirl.

With a second Q already supposedly in the offing, it looks like McDonald won't be taking his foot off the pedal any time soon.

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THE BEST BIT

»The beautifully
smokey Jospers
ribs

MENU HIGHLIGHTS

❖ Bag of barbecued Cornish hens' wings	£4/6.50
❖ Sea bass ceviche with spicy plantain	£9.75
❖ Fish sharing board: sea bass plantain, tuna crudo, Q hot smoked salmon, shrimps	£18
❖ Meat sharing board: Jospers ribs, flat-iron steak, grilled pig collar, pit-roast chicken	£27.50
❖ Pit-roast chicken, garlic and lemon for two	£20

