



Sleek design, killer cocktails and tasty food like the crab brioche make L'Abattoir a Gastown go-to spot.

photo Tim Pawsey

## L'Abattoir continues to up Gastown's game



**The  
Hired Belly**  
with  
Tim Pawsey

There's no doubt that recently unveiled L'Abattoir (217 Carrall St., 604-568-1701) continues to raise Gastown's game. This sleek, exposed red brick, wood, steel and original tile-trimmed space offers further amplification of the neighbourhood's growing dining repertoire, which now rivals that of Yaletown.

So far, L'Abattoir's prime lure is its busy bar—we love the stainless steel stools—that puts out stellar cocktails, under the increasingly seasoned hand of Shaun Layton (ex-George). Still savouring our recent trip to Spain, we couldn't resist his Fino sour—an intelligent balance of Fino and Cognac, tuned up with fresh lemon and grapefruit zest. It's hard to just sip this one, but we did.

The business end of the place is teasingly concealed behind a three-quarter wall, which gives a hint of the open kitchen—and we found ourselves peaking in more than once.

Owner Paul Grunberg brings pretty

good smarts, following stints at Market by Jean-Georges, Chambard and more recently Bao Bei. His best move was lassoing chef Lee Cooper (also ex-Market) into coming along with him.

Some worthy tastes at our initial foray ranged from a confit of Albacore tuna with smoky pork morsels to velvety crab custard in "brioche" with chick pea toast and Mostaccioli pasta with mozzarella. Overall the plates are inventive, ingredients well sourced (local as much as possible) and presentation thoughtful and detail driven—although some tweaks are in order. The bread plate yielded one of the better selections seen in some time, and wines are well chosen, with some interesting labels and moderately priced.

If previous tenants the Irish Heather ever suffered, it was the upstairs space always seemed less appealing. It's fair to say, despite the wholesale refit and all the bells and whistles downstairs, especially in the soaring foyer and bar, the new incarnation's layout isn't that different. Proof in point, we snuck off a couple of times to peer over the rear balcony at the diners below, ensconced in the more interesting airy atrium adjacent to Gaoler's Mews.

With such a vociferous nod to the neighbourhood's supposed slaughter-

house heritage, we'd expected more grilled and carnivorous choices. Then again, maybe these will be in place come fall, when we'll head back for a more extensive tasting.

Overall though, with great vibe and no shortage of depth in the kitchen, L'Abattoir has promise aplenty.

♦♦♦