

BENTLEY'S OYSTER BAR & GRILL

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Forget the credit crunch and dine in style at one of London's best oyster bars

Where? Bentley's Oyster Bar & Grill, 11-15 Swallow Street, London W1B 4DG (020 7734 4756, www.bentleys.org)

An oyster bar in Mayfair! Haven't you heard there's a recession underway? Credit

crunch be damned, it seems London's seafood fans aren't ready to give up their oysters just yet. Even on the blustery and rainy evening we visited in January, there wasn't a spare seat to be had at the gloriously gentlemanly bar, nor the leather banquettes which surround it. And let's not forget this is just any old oyster bar. Originally opened in 1916, the current incarnation of Bentley's hasn't lost any of its old charm, with an old-world style to both the service and the décor, but top-notch modern standards.



Surely the bankers are all at home though? Not a bit of it, although the men in the pinstriped suits are given a run for their money by the starry-eyed couples sharing shellfish platters and fresh-of-the-boat Dover sole to the accompaniment of live jazz. For romantics of every age (and they spanned from twenty- to eighty-somethings when we were there), this is the perfect date place.

So what are all these loved-up couples eating? It being an oyster bar and all, half a dozen of Maldon Rock's finest are a popular choice to start with. That being said, crustacean aficionados can choose from a wide range of varieties, including Helford River Natives and Strangford Lough Rock, while the uneducated amongst us (that would be me, then) can choose a 'Selection of Oysters' (£14.75) for the chance to try a few different types and get a quick oysters-for-dummies lesson into the bargain. The Mediterranean Fish Soup is another delicious must-try, while I also coveted my neighbour's Atlantic Prawns with Egg Mayonnaise.

And the fizz to match? There's an extensive wine menu with sparkling wines ranging from a delicious Prosecco at around £7 a glass to a 1996 Dom Ruinart Blanc de Blancs at nearly £200 a bottle. For your oysters, however, a chilled class of Muscadet is the recommended accompaniment, after which there's a whole range of whites, roses and reds, many available by the glass or carafe.

What about those of us with a large appetite? Look straight to the ever-changing chalkboard, packed with seasonal specials. Our grilled lobster (£19), cooked with garlic and butter and served with chips and rocket salad, was simply perfect, while a classic Bentley's Fish Pie (£16.95) the best I've ever tried.

Any room for pud? Bentley's Trifle (£7.70) is famous for a reason, although the homemade vanilla ice cream (£4.50) is another example of the kitchen's ability to make classic dishes every bit as special as the snazzier sounding choices on the menu.

Need to know: As well as the oyster bar, upstairs at Bentley's you'll find more formal dining rooms, including the Grill Room, Rib Room and Crustacea Room. The Oyster & Champagne Bar is open Monday to Saturday from midday until midnight and on Sundays from midday until 10pm.

Review by Carla Bevan

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