

The Loft Lounge

A TASTE OF NEW YORK

After a busy day with little time to think let alone eat (I'd been on a photo shoot all day), I trudged down a rain-soaked Hurst Street in search of some respite. My stomach was rumbling, my throat parched and my cold soaked feet were in desperate need of a rest. Oh, the trials of a socialite and general gal about town. Lol.

Having heard many positive things about the newly refurbished Loft Lounge, my expectations were high. The deep purple exterior reminded me of a warehouse conversion; it's very New York and succeeds in brightening up the otherwise dingy Bromsgrove Street. On entrance I found the inside was glowing and vibrant, with a scattering of city folk enjoying an after work drink and catch up. Considering the weather had been horrendous all day and most other places were noticeably empty, The Loft Lounge was buzzing.

The bar and lounge area was incredibly homely; people are encouraged to relax, kick back and enjoy the surroundings whether with a large group of friends, your significant other or, like me, waiting for a pal. Here you will rub shoulders with a chic melange of urbanites from the nearby Southside apartments, local office folk and some of the second city's most colourful characters. Whoever you are and from wherever you have come, you'll find that the Loft Lounge is imminently friendly and easy-going. Just as well; my friend was running notoriously late, but I didn't mind; it gave me a chance to try the gorgeous vodka & apple juice.

The dining area is separate to the bar and provides a completely different ambience. Comparatively, it is more formal as you might expect from a restaurant, but it still manages to retain its chilled-out Big Apple feel without falling into the trap of becoming starched and overly austere. Black and purple seems to be the running theme throughout the whole venue, which sounds slightly harsh and gothic, yet is actually very stylish. Everything is styled to perfection, from the pewter candlesticks to the tablecloths that complement the artwork; it's clear that the Loft Lounge has been designed rather than happening by accident, which so many other venues can be accused of.

With such a high standard of interior décor, I had high hopes for the food...or would it be a case of all fur coat and no knickers? I would soon find out, as my friend finally arrived and I order a second apple vodka whilst I check out the (enormous) menu.

Menu-wise, both the food and drink take direct inspiration from New York and, as you would expect, it serves food throughout the day (from brunch through to dinner). To start with we chose a sharing plate called "skin and bones" which consisted of potato skins loaded with cheese and vegetables with BBQ pork Ribs. The presentation was second to none; a colourful strawberry side salad and demonstrative of the Loft Lounge's attention to detail and visual flair. That said, whilst the Ribs were finger-licking good, the skins would certainly have benefited from some extra seasoning.

Asha's

*Legendary singer Asha Bhosle, immortalised in the Cornershop hit **Brimful of Asha**, has taken the Midlands by storm with the opening of her highly acclaimed and eponymous restaurant, **Asha's**. Situated in the heart of Birmingham, the restaurant prides itself on dishing up exotic 'desi' fare for the British palate.*

Best described as an innovative style of Indian restaurant that mixes traditional North Western cuisine with contemporary style and innovative design, the singer spent three months developing the menu for the new restaurant, which will serve traditional Indian dishes and contemporary flavours.

"We picked up something from Punjab, something from Maharashtra, and by picking up bits and pieces from many places I prepared the menu," says Asha.

This is set to be the third Asha's establishment in the world and follows the success of her Dubai and Kuwait based restaurants. Asha also plans to open three more restaurants in the UK this year in Manchester, Leeds and London.

Asha's is @ 12-22 Newhall Street, Birmingham, B3 3LX. Tel 0121 200 2767



I settled for a Loft Lounge Burger for my main - My burger was loaded with bacon, cheese, and caramelised onions and served on fresh ciabatta bread with a side of French Fries. My only gripe was that I prefer my meat a tad rare, but this is nothing that could not have been rectified if I had only spoken up, and it did nothing to spoil my enjoyment. My partner chose their signature Creole Chicken, which I was told, was lovely.

Despite the menu being similar to that of an American Diner, it has a distinctive twist and a quality that makes it personal to the Loft Lounge; a certain je ne sais quoi that few venues ever achieve but that the Loft Lounge has in spades. With dinner rounded off by a freshly ground coffee apiece, we were well and truly stuffed. I have also been informed that the Menu is being refreshed later this spring, so watch out!

I maintain that you can never really judge a venue until you have experienced it firsthand, but I have to say that it lived up to its hype; it is a refreshing and glamorous addition to the city's food and bar scene and brings an eclectic New York feel to the heart of Britain's second city.

The Loft Lounge is @ 143 Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham, B5 6RG. Tel 0121 622 2444.

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