



Federal Café  
Parlament 39  
Tel. 93 187 3607  
www.federalcafe.es  
Open Tues-Thurs 8am-10pm  
Fri and Sat until 1am  
Sun 9am-5.30pm  
Approx €20 for 2 courses  
and a glass or two of wine

# A league of their own

**Pared down design and all-day appeal make this café a winner for Tara Stevens.**

By Tara Stevens.

**F**ederal Café, for all its simplicity, has been the surprise opening of 2010, and arguably one of the hottest. It's the creation of Christopher King and Tommy Tang who previously owned Papa Bubble, the sweet shop in the Barri Gòtic which they sold a couple of years ago. They've been dreaming up this Sydney-style café ever since and what a welcome arrival it is. One can only imagine it is going to transform the fortunes of Sant Antoni.

From its corner perch on Parlament with Comte Borrell it opens into a cool, clean space of geometric lines, blonde wood floors and charcoal grey walls. A large communal dining table dominates the middle of the room, decked with sculptural flower arrangements by the same girl who does the flowers at the Hotel Arts and floor-to-ceiling windows which open directly onto the street to create natty, one-person banquettes, where you can sit, tray at your side and watch the world go by.

Upstairs, there is more seating and table arrangements: some low slung and slouchy, others more sit-down formal and a staircase that leads to a smart, lushly planted roof terrace. Already it's a massive hit with the yummy mummies of the *barrio*, who come with the kids at the weekend, or for a latte after the mid-week school run. People like me turn up with their laptops (free WiFi) mid-morning and treat it like a second office.

The fact that Barcelona doesn't yet have anywhere quite like it (I'm sure the copycats won't be far behind) adds to the allure, especially since it's at its busiest in the morning, filling what has, until now, been a bit of a breakfasting void. It's a place to linger over your coffee with a useful stack of work-avoidance glossies (*Architectural Digest*, *Wallpaper\**, *Vogue*) and the Spanish newspapers (*El País*, *La Vanguardia*, *El Periódico*) absorbed over cast-iron pots of baked eggs topped with spinach and mushrooms, pancetta and a dollop of crème fraîche, or a

dish of homemade baked beans sprinkled with *dukkah* the Egyptian dry mix of seeds, nuts, herbs and spices.

When breakfast is better than dinner, you know you're onto a winner. But this place is all about multi-tasking and the options for light, festive indulgence are seemingly endless: a cup of tea with a toasted lemon and poppy seed Madeleine in the afternoon after Christmas shopping, a civilised salad for a quiet lunch, or an early evening drink with the girls after work. There are cocktails you see—rose martinis, honeysuckle daiquiris, lemon gimlets—which must surely have been created with the ladies in mind and a short, nicely put together wine list showcasing interesting rather than crowd-pleasing bottles, much of it available by the glass.

So it is that one lazy afternoon when I find myself with not a great deal to do, tea and cupcakes soon turn into cocktails and dinner. The music turns jazzy and mellow, the lights dim and it's all too comfortable to leave. Besides, my friend has spotted somebody else's burger and refuses to leave until he gets one too. We order it with a side of potato wedges tossed in truffle oil as, after all, it is nearly Christmas. When it comes it's big—too big to comfortably cram in my mouth—very juicy, and bleeding beetroot juice. Beetroot and burgers seems to be very much an Aussie thing and an innovation I'd argue gives many of the better burgers around town a run for their money. I have a posher rack of lamb with a pistachio tapenade, which is pleasingly pink and herby and picks up the nutty sweetness of the pistachios brilliantly. A bright carrot, kalamata olive and feta salad comes on the side.

With breakfast costing between €3 and €6, salads around €4.70, burgers €9.50, and mains around €11.50 this is one local eatery I can see I'm going to be spending a lot of time in. Happy Christmas everyone. **M**