



**OUR VERDICT**

Typical of the new Brains pub/  
restaurant hybrid. Drink and eat, or  
just drink, or just eat; hearty, affordable  
food, served by friendly staff in  
contemporary, relaxed surroundings.

The clear choice when meeting  
friends in the city centre

# The Yard

*The city centre's most stylish bar serves well-priced, filling, super-fresh fare all day long – for which Deri Robins and team are truly grateful*

We are reliably informed that metallics are big news this spring, which means that back in October 2003, when The Yard opened its doors, the design team behind its renovation were positively prophetic in their interior sensibilities.

The place positively gleams with the stuff; the stainless-steel bars and immaculately polished copper piping are both a respectful nod to the building's brewery heritage, and blamelessly contemporary. Exposed brick walls, iron spiral staircases and girders mix with large plasma screens; all in all, it's a classic example of the way in which Cardiff's industrial heritage has been harnessed for the leisure-obsessed 21st century.

The Yard is Brains's flagship within the regenerated Old Brewery Quarter on St Mary Street. The Albert stood on this site, overlooking the brewery yard; hence the large portrait of the Prince Consort dominating the first of the rooms. Altogether, it's a huge space – capacity is around 800 – though it's niftily divided into separate seating areas; the smaller first floor has a loungey, loft-spacey vibe.

Anyone familiar with the new breed of Brains bars will know what to expect. They're not gastropubs; that implies an established inn that's had the good sense to hire a name chef and charge top prices for artfully presented fare. Like the Grape & Olive, The Yard is a bit more 'concept' than that; for one thing, the whole space has been conceived afresh, for another, it's open from brunch to throwing-out time, and – especially at The Yard – the food it serves is eminently affordable.

All of which made it a perfect early-evening pitstop for the *Cardiff Life* girls when they had a 7pm event to attend and didn't fancy going on an empty stomach. It was a bit of a shock to discover that even at 5.30 there was hardly a free table (although the place emptied with dramatic speed at around 7pm; Westlife were in town, and all the hair-straightened Valleys girls who'd poured into the place earlier were now hot-footing it to the CIA).

We didn't fancy the long thin table facing the kitchen, or the one in the window with the strange curved benches, so we bagged the last remaining conventional round wooden



Carbs a-gogo; The Yard likes to feed you up

one near the woodburning stove – a godsend, since a Force-8 wind appeared to be blowing down from the Arctic straight to St Mary Street, and we were so frozen with cold that it wasn't funny.

It was the kind of evening that positively invites the mass consumption of good, hot comfort food – something that The Yard tends to specialise in. You can nibble daintily

*“It was the kind of evening that positively encouraged the consumption of comfort food”*

on a salad (Caesar, tuna, smoked duck, goats' cheese), but you'd have to possess a will of iron not to succumb to the carbastic allure of the burgers, pastas, fish and chips or the char-grilled sandwiches – or, best of all, the 'fire and sticks', the house speciality, in which beef, chicken, lamb or prawns are dramatically flame-grilled before your eyes, and served with a gorgeous dipping sauce.

Self-control not being a standout character trait among the *Cardiff Life* dining team, it was to this selection that we immediately turned, while sipping thoughtfully on a nourishing pint of SA.

I settled on the char-grilled burger, passing over the Celtic Pride in favour of the Bacon Welsh. Half a cow, surely; more than I could eat, topped with Welsh rarebit and smoky bacon, sandwiched between toasty baps and with a pile of The Yard's signature thick-cut chips; red coleslaw offered a brief nod towards the day's essential vitamin intake. The chips were great (those we'd had on a previous visit were a tad underdone, so maybe it's a bit hit and miss here); they were impeccably soft and fluffy on the inside, crisp on the outside; a pot of mayo for dunking delivered the coup de grace to the post-Christmas detox.

Laura had chosen the wild mushroom and goats' cheese lasagne. Portions were generous, the filling creamy, and it did the job, but the pasta was a little overcooked and the goats' cheese didn't make a huge impact. In case she was still a little peckish, the plate came laden with new potatoes and garlic ciabatta.

Kate – smugly, I might add – had made the best choice of the night with a chicken satay from the 'fire and sticks' menu. Big, generous chunks of supremely tender, tastily marinated fowl with a spicy peanut sauce, with yet more chips and coleslaw. Oh, and we ordered some Welsh rarebit and onion rings (piping hot and succulent). Oh, and a sticky toffee pudding to finish with – thankfully we only ordered the one – and three spoons.

Did we mention it was cold outside?

Unlike many publications, *Cardiff Life* does not solicit complimentary meals or advertising in return for favourable reviews. Our team dines incognito in order to give our readers a genuinely independent assessment.

**Opening hours:** Mon-Sat, 10am-1am; Sun, 11am-12.30am; food served Mon-Sun, 10am-10pm

**We visited:** Monday evening

**Prices:** All our mains cost £7.95; salads are from £6.95, sandwiches from £4.25, puddings from £3.45; in other words, it's all very affordable. Most expensive are the steak grills; even they are £11.95 tops

**Vegetarian choice:** It's certainly not The Yard's speciality, but there are a few choices

**Disabled access:** Good

**Children:** Up until 7pm

• The Yard  
42-43 St Mary Street, Cardiff  
tel: 02920 227577  
[www.sabrain.com](http://www.sabrain.com)