

London Evening Standard

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WEST END FINAL

LABOUR LEADER'S MANIFESTO UNCLEAR ON TAX AND SPENDING, SAY EXPERTS

MILIBAND: I'LL HELP FAMILIES AND THE LOW-PAID

Joe Murphy Political Editor

ED MILIBAND today claimed "I am ready" to be Prime Minister as he unveiled just five new pledges in his manifesto.

The Labour leader's plans included an £8 minimum wage by October 2019, a one-year rail fares freeze and guaranteed before-and-after-school children staffed by volunteers. Mr

Miliband tried to turn the tables on David Cameron by saying his modest commitments were more credible than what he claimed were £20 billion of "unfunded" promises from the Tories.

But Paul Johnson, head of the respected Institute for Fiscal Studies, said the manifesto had given "no additional clarity" about how much taxation

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High note: singer Katherine Jenkins said today she is "overjoyed" to be expecting her first child — a girl — in the autumn with husband Andrew Levitas. FULL STORY: Page 5

KATHERINE'S BABY JOY

Inside



Preacher shooting: man is arrested
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Grammy star helps on mum's market stall
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Boat Race spectators saved from rising tide
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Sport



Spieth is my new rival, says McIlroy
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Barcelona is finding its sea legs

HOTEL REVIEW THE SERRAS

Barcelona

PHOEBE LUCKHURST

BARCELONA is a city that faces inwards. The Catalan capital has always built with its back to the seaside; though it harbours a busy port, the seafront has traditionally served as a temporary holding pen for visitors who move away from the coast as soon as they get off their cruise ship. Essentially, when there's a bewilderingly half-finished cathedral to gape at, spending the mini-break building sandcastles would feel rather like you'd missed the point.

But the seafront is changing; the Port Vell marina has just undergone a €125million renovation. The Serras is a totem of the transformation: the newly-opened hotel faces the sea, and the beach is minutes away. Situated on the site of Picasso's first studio, it is leading a transformation of the city's waterfront: it's the promenade's first five-star hotel, though others are coming and, significantly, a Soho House is promised later this year (Nick Jones never misses a wave of gentrification).

The hotel has 30 rooms and suites. The top floor gives way to a rooftop terrace with a (tiny) pool, a (well-stocked) bar and a colony of sunloungers. My room – a junior suite – looked onto the port and the two floor-to-ceiling windows opened onto mini-balconies from which to enjoy the full force of Barcelona's brave new world.

If you can take your eyes off the horizon, a junior suite comprises a spacious bedroom and lounge, containing a desk, sofa, bijou tables, a vast television and even larger bed, thrown against an eye-catching geometric bedhead. It ticked all the boxes on modern design hotel bingo: a Nespresso machine; Malin + Goetz toiletries in the bathroom; a bewildering conglomeration of light switches that defy rhyme, reason and circuitry. Blackout blinds kept encroaching sunshine at bay to the point that I almost missed a whole morning in the city.

There is stiff competition from elsewhere in the city on the dining front but you'll eat well at the hotel. The restaurant is headed by Michelin-starred chef Marc Gascons;



High society: enjoy meals on the rooftop terrace at The Serras

his menu riffs heavily on Catalan cuisine (vegetarians will be sated, if not excited, by copious carbohydrates and cheeses).

Food is served in half-portion for sharing; highlights include pa amb tomaquet, toasted bread spread generously with sweet, juicy tomatoes; artichokes fried with Romesco; and a salty risotto filled with chunks of artichoke and asparagus. Gnocchi is doused in a creamy, buttery sauce and served with truffles and meat options (which include a burger, steak, Tataki and meatballs) are all derived from beasts fattened on the local land. Seafood is also local; and delicious – Barcelona should really give the sea more credit.

Breakfast is suitably laid-back – help yourself to pastries, breads and cheeses (or demand a platter of rich scrambled eggs), washed down with freshly squeezed juices, and ridicule the tourists zooming past on Segways (set ever so slightly below street level, the restaurant is a choice vantage point for observation). If you're not

too fussed about sea views and architectural pilgrimages, you could spend a perfectly good weekend getting louche and loose on The Serras's cocktail menu (insider tip: best enjoyed from the roof terrace). The Picasso – a sweet jumble of spirits and flavours – was a favourite of the weekend; as was the hotel's version of a Hugo (elderflower and mint, served with Catalan Cava).

The hotel's location is an ideal starting point for discovering the city: it's a five-minute walk to La Rambla (if "holiday" for you means "simulating the conditions of Oxford Street"); as well as the renovated marina, it overlooks the Gothic quarter and is only a short walk to the lesser known cathedral, La Seu, and the Mercat de Santa Caterina, which dispenses juicy local fruits and fleshy thighs of Catalan meat. The Serras has an agreement with local private member's club OneOcean, which is situated in the regenerated port and where we ate one evening. The building is a glass cuboid, giving the impression that you're floating

gently on the sea itself; meals are light (to preclude seasickness?) but toss together unexpected ingredients: one salad conjured artichokes, Asian leaves, cheese, Kalamata olives, orange, walnuts, pears, and black truffle into a bed of other leaves, drizzled with honey-infused olive oil. Courses are small – nibbles of meat rather than hearty chunks – which just encourages you to get more. Some guests described the gooey chocolate dessert as death by pudding; my saintlier option involved a tower of fresh fruit and light yoghurt.

The Serras's Barcelona-born founder, Jordi Serra, hoped to create a local hotel that celebrates a new aspect of the city; this is proof that Barcelona has finally got its eyes on the sea.

■ *The Serras, Passeig de Colom 9, Barcelona, Spain (00 34 93 169 1868; hoteltheserrasbarcelona.com).*

Doubles start at €238, B&B.

■ *The writer flew with Monarch (0871 940 5040, monarch.co.uk) from Gatwick to Barcelona-El Prat.*



Barcelona reborn: The Port Vell marina, renovated to the tune of €125 million; comfort and mod cons in your bedroom at The Serras, where rooms have mini balconies, above right