

# The View review

**Annie Bullen**

*finds less is more at Barnard's Restaurant*



**Barnard's Restaurant • Hambledon Road • Denmead • PO7 6NU  
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Over the years I've discovered that more isn't better when it comes to restaurant menus.

It's easy to write a long and impressive-looking menu which, because of its very length, relies heavily on ready-prepared food.

So it was with pleasure I read the menu at Barnard's which featured lemon sole, guinea fowl, steak, salmon, mussels and lamb cutlets – all picked because they were good at the time. There was also Swiss cheese soufflé, griddle polenta, a tart with goat's cheese and red onion and a choice of home-made soups. It was reassuring to see that the guinea fowl was offered as a main course, simply pan-fried and, on the set menu, as a starter in the form of rilletes, showing that here was a chef who doesn't waste food and knows what to do with all the bits of a bird or fish.

Denmead, a large village in the breathing space between the Meon Valley and Portsmouth, is lucky to have a restaurant of this quality, and it obviously knows it. We visited on a midweek lunchtime, looking forward to the drive down the Meon Valley, and found the restaurant pretty busy with people eating proper lunches.

Chef-proprietor David Barnard and his wife



Sandie, who have been here for 18 years, have established a comfortable and spacious restaurant with large bright paintings on the walls and a flower-filled courtyard to dine in if the weather is kind.

Roy, delighted to discover another Pompey football supporter in David, picked fresh tomato and orange soup to start with. The other soup was carrot and coriander.

Good mussels, properly cooked, are a test of a chef. If he can source small tender mussels and cook them simply to bring out their flavour, he knows his stuff. I need not have worried. They had been steamed open on some onions sweated in a little butter and finished with a dash of cream and fresh herbs. There was chewy bread to mop up the juice.

We were diverted at this stage as the butter swan, sitting prettily, collapsed in a graceful heap.

'They always do that,' said our waitress.

There are three menus, all of which apply to both lunch and dinner. You can mix and match. The *à la carte* featured more substantial main courses, including a griddled polenta with crispy vegetables for non-meat-eaters. Then there's the set three-course menu from which Roy chose his soup and a rib-eye steak with chunky chips



and peppercorn sauce. That came with fresh runner beans and courgettes.

I diverted to the 'dine with wine menu' for the goat's cheese and red onion tart. A square of rough puff pastry contained a lovely base of red onion, cooked down to a juicy mass. The grilled cheese sat on top and the whole was balanced on a leafy salad, nicely dressed.

In the interests of proper reporting I tried the trio of puddings, which was ambitious at lunch time. Roy asked for a plate of cheese.

Ambitious or not I started gently on the vanilla brulee, tapping through the crispy sugar topping to the subtle custard. Then the chocolate ice-cream with its biscuity container and kirsch-soaked cherries. I saved the mini summer pudding, juicy with blackcurrants and rich with clotted cream, for the last treat. I was sorry I had no inclination after all that indulgence to try some of the cheese which was all locally sourced and included a Barkham Blue, a Lyburn and a Wigmore sheep's cheese.

David popped out of the kitchen for a chat and, when he and Roy weren't talking Pompey, I did manage to find out that he'd spent time with Michelin-starred John Burton Race at Oxford's Petit Blanc restaurant and that he goes for local ingredients every time, altering the menu as necessary to suit.

'It's a living menu,' he said. 'It undergoes major changes with the seasons but is tweaked all the time according to what our suppliers can produce.'

**Our meal, without drinks, came to about £40** **V**