

The View review

In need of a treat, Dia Newland heads to Salisbury



Hox Brasserie • 155 Fisherton Street • Salisbury • SP2 7RP
01722 341600 • www.hoxbrasserie.co.uk

There's a festival at the end of our year – I refuse to name names yet – which demands a certain amount of shopping. No matter how abstemious you plan to be; it has to be done. It takes a certain amount of courage to start the annual campaign but the secret is to mark the progress made with treats. Little havens of pleasure.

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So, passing swiftly over the presents, provisions and other exhausting paraphernalia, I found myself sitting in a clean, minimalist restaurant in Salisbury called Hox Brasserie. Atiquil Hoque founded the restaurant some 10 years ago and wished to give a welcome to diners, intending that they should feel comfortable and at home. It certainly works. The brasserie was busy with people, many of whom were obviously 'old hands', enjoying their meal with friends or family.



The menu concentrates on southern Indian cuisine: quite a different approach to other Indian restaurants. Many southern meat dishes were developed in the region of Goa, once a Portuguese colony, and the use of vinegar with spices is a specific art. Since coming to England, Hox Brasserie's head chef Rajeev Kumar has worked at The Cinnamon Club in Westminster, and Chutney Mary in Chelsea, so our evening was in safe hands.

The simple titles on the menu enable the reader to quickly find what they are looking for. I chose lamb chops for a starter, because they were char grilled in a Rajasthani marinade of fresh coriander, garlic and cardamom, and that sounded good to me. And they were good. The lamb was tender and the flavour enhanced, not compromised, by the punchy spices used in the marinade. My partner chose tandoori prawns – marinated with rosemary, vinegar and exotic spices then char grilled, served on a bed of garlic potato mash. This was a very pretty dish and pretty quickly despatched.

In the king prawn malai curry that I chose for my main, the prawns were cooked in a cashew and coconut east Indian style sauce, and served with steamed rice. A good contrast to my first course, the flavours were soft and creamy and sumptuous. John's main course, methi chicken – a chicken breast char grilled and cooked in a fenugreek and Indian herb sauce and served with pilau rice – looked equally fine. He was complimentary and as the strained expression created by his shopping experience was replaced by smiles, I knew it must past muster.

The restaurant is in effect in three tiers. From our table we could view the second

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tier, which is almost a balcony affair and could be why the dining room has a light airy feel. Taking a breather, and hoping that we might fit in a small pudding in a little while, we went to look at the third tier; the upstairs restaurant. This is where large party gatherings of up to 100 get together and it is serviced by its own bar and staff. It was certainly being put to good use that evening with a large party busily tucking into their food.

Back to the menu: we decided we would share a small pud, leaving space for a coffee. The rather exotically named chocolate silk with ice cream lived up to its name, not in the least bit sticky, but slippery with a clean finish. The ice cream made a perfect partnership.

As the meal progressed I became aware of the attention to detail Atiquil has taken in all aspects of the dining experience that he creates. The coffee was particularly fine, Davidoff coffee, which a writer in *The Telegraph* described not long ago as 'elusive'. Atiquil duly informed me that it is served in few restaurants; I was glad his was one of them. I also couldn't resist asking him about his very sleek and innovative cutlery, which turned out to be a Robert Welch design. Maybe I could mention the Christmas word after all, and start making a wish list of my own. ▼

Our meal for two, without drinks, came to £45.30