

The View review

Rosemary Staal
*is 'star struck' by
a Michelin chef*



JSW • 20 Dragon Street • Petersfield • Hants • GU31 4JJ • 0871 426 5950

Writing these reviews has taught me an important lesson that I must heed. It is this: that there is a finite number of superlatives in the English language and that one can become repetitious to the point of being boring by rhapsodising too much.

I know I have almost always eaten well wherever I have gone in the 14 months since we started The View Review, and I hope I have conveyed that, but I feel it's time I conducted a little harsh self-examination. The reason is that I fear my superlatives have hit the buffers and from today I am not going to lob them about with such abandon.

My stock of 'wonderfuls' and 'amazings' is pretty much exhausted and there really isn't anywhere to go when that happens. What can be more wonderful than wonderful, and more amazing than amazing?

You really want to know? Forgive me if this is a corny way of getting the message across, but the answer is JSW.

It is more, much more, than amazing and wonderful and every other flattering adjective you can think of. And it's here, on our patch, not in some inaccessible London street where you can't park your car and daren't step out unless you're dressed head to foot in designer desirables.

Jake Saul Watkins is the chef proprietor of JSW. He's 36, has held a Michelin star for five years and hopes that one day in the future he might add another. Eat as we did in his lovely restaurant and you can imagine that being a very real probability.

Jake has worked in kitchens since he was 15 and did his initial training at Southampton College. I do hope they're proud of him because they ought to be.

His knowledge and passion sing out in his empathetic treatment of good, honest ingredients unfussily presented without need of garnish and folderols. He changes the menu two or three times a week to reflect what's in season and, like all good chefs worth their salt, favours local mainly organic produce.

What do we choose? For me: fricassee of lobster and summer vegetables followed by wild sea bass (caught on rod and line in the Solent) with fennel risotto and red wine sauce. For D: salmon with Jersey Royals and asparagus followed by honey-roasted sweetly pink duck breast with lentils, Jerusalem artichoke and fresh summer truffle.

I revel in one of my favourite vegetables: fennel shavings atop my perfectly cooked lobster and a fennel risotto that so sublimely complements the tasty sea bass that they might even have been to the same school. The summer vegetables with the lobster, by the way, include asparagus, pea shoots (very trendy, very tasty) and samphire.

D rarely chooses to eat salmon but is so glad he's made an exception this time. 'Moist,

really tasty – just right,' he says. Water-bath cooking is the method Jake uses to retain the fish's integrity, I am intrigued to learn.

The duck and its accompaniments are also much appreciated by D, who suffers a bumpy ride at home where meat is concerned and so loves to be let out to enjoy it when it's good quality and expertly cooked.

Our meal ends with a pair of desserts quite beyond compare. Honeycomb parfait with Valrhona chocolate for me and Earl Grey tea crème brûlée with Gariguettes strawberries for D.

Service, which can make or break a restaurant however good the food, is exemplary at JSW: discreet, knowledgeable, utterly charming and mostly French. It is quite clear that this well-drilled team, Jake's frontline ambassadors, fervently want everyone to have an occasion to remember. That's certainly the case for us but also for a man at the next table who is presented with a small, candle-topped birthday cake just before he and his two companions leave. There is no embarrassing ceremony attached to this kind gesture, just a quiet, subtly executed recognition of the fact that theirs had been a celebration meal. The cake goes home with them, wrapped in foil.

We leave too, taking with us not cake but the thrilling realisation that we have just enjoyed a meal that ranks right up there among the all-time greats. Truly wonderful, truly amazing and, yes, quite superlative.

Our three-course meal for two, including a £5 supplement for lobster but excluding wine: £90 V

