

The View review

Annie Bullen
dines in royal style



**New Park Manor Hotel • Lyndhurst Road • Brockenhurst • New Forest • Hampshire
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Oh, the relief of a decent-sized table, a substantial chair, room to move without getting intimate with people you've never seen before and music so discreet that it soothed without enraging.

The day before my visit to New Park Manor in the New Forest, where all these comforts are taken for granted, I'd eaten lunch at a certain famous person's restaurant in Oxford. Top marks for food but we emerged battered by noise levels that made staying the course an endurance rather than a pleasure. Space is not an issue at New Park Manor, found at the top of a long, winding drive through parkland full of grazing horses, a reminder that there's an equestrian centre here and polo is played in the grounds.

Dusk was falling but it wasn't too dark to admire the contemporary planting of grasses in the beds outside the 17th-century building, once a hunting lodge for Charles II whose portrait hangs in the Rufus Lounge. Elsewhere are paintings of his favourite mistresses, Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland and Louise Renée de Penancoët de

Kéroualle. Which is to say that the prospect of dinner in a comfortable setting with a sense of history has a lot going for it.

It had been a while since I'd seen Lindsey, so we had a lot to talk about, but not so much that we couldn't enjoy the canapés - smoked mackerel, tomato and mozzarella and a paté on commendably crisp toast.

We ate in the Terrace Room, which on a sunny day has doors flung wide so diners can sit outside and enjoy the views. The Stag Restaurant with its Jacobean wood panelling is the main dining area.

Waiting for our starters, we sipped at a tiny mug of thick flavourful soup made with parsnip and swede and nibbled bread flavoured with lemon and thyme. Lindsey's fennel risotto, topped with rocket, was full of subtle smoky flavours while the mussels in front of me were small, plump and delicious with a thick creamy sauce that demanded more bread (a crisp ciabatta this time) for mopping up. Each of these starters is a speciality of the chef. The menu is described as 'modern English', which is to say it embraces traditional favourites cooked with an inventive twist. We could have chosen salmon tian with lemon *crème fraîche* and beetroot coulis, pork and root vegetable terrine, loin of tuna with noodles and a soy

and honey dressing, or breast of wood pigeon with a broad bean salad.

A crop of late broad beans must have found their way into the kitchen because the main courses included broad bean and sweet potato cakes (what a good combination). Lindsey chose sea bream, filleted and poached, lying prettily on noodles darkened with squid ink and decorated with a few mussels and some baby turnips, poached at the same time. The fish was firm and well flavoured while its underlying broth gave a tasty tang to the noodles.

My herb-stuffed noisettes of lamb, cooked rare and sliced into rounds, with a thin layer of fat giving a crispy coating to the skin, were surrounded by a redcurrant sauce and served on a beetroot and celeriac rösti (another idea that I'm going to pinch). It was tender and delicious.

Other choices that evening included grilled fillets of mackerel with a warm tomato and chilli chutney and breast of corn-fed chicken on savoy cabbage with pancetta.

I love restaurant puddings – huge plates with lots of delicious little treats. Lindsey sipped from a shot glass full of peach *frappé*, lined up with a small heap of fresh raspberries both of which accompanied her beautiful basil and lemon mousse. I ate a meltingly delicious iced strawberry soufflé with a little, subtly flavoured white tower which turned out to be the Champagne chilboust. Two tiny dark 'chocolates' revealed themselves as cinnamon-flavoured doughnuts, crisp on the outside and nicely chewy inside.

A pot of peppermint tea under the gaze of Charles II in the Rufus Lounge, was a comfortable end to a meal that sent us off into the night soothed and happy. **V**



The comfort of the Rufus Lounge



Dusk on the terrace

Our dinner, without wine, came to £93