

The View review

Rosemary Staal
*finds comfort and joy
in the New Forest*



The Beaulieu Hotel • Beaulieu Road • Beaulieu • 023 8029 3344 • newforesthotels.co.uk

Taking a seat in a restaurant involves a similar risk to sitting down in an empty railway carriage: you simply don't know who your neighbours are going to be.

No sooner have D and I settled at our delightful table for two in the corner of this large and sumptuously decorated restaurant, with a glimpse of the New Forest through the garden door behind us, than a retired couple take up residence at the next table.

From their conversation, which is unmissable despite the considerable distance between us, we learn that they have been staying at the hotel for two days, that they have spent a 'beauliful' day at the Motor Museum and that they like everything here so much that a return visit is definitely on the cards.

With that recommendation almost literally ringing in our ears, we tackle the most difficult task of the night – choosing what to eat. The menu has plenty to tempt us. It's about as far away from the erstwhile hotel classic of brown Windsor soup as you can get, with a good mix of meat, fish and vegetarian and a proliferation of such ubiquitous modern embellishments as marmalades, essences, fondants, glazes and jams.

My starter is a red pepper salsa with a warm goat's cheese on top. It is very wonderful. I love goat's cheese in any guise, and prepared like this it is a winner. Then I completely overface myself with a huge chunk of aubergine filled with couscous, glazed with brie and served with a red pepper essence. Again, it's a dish that has been prepared by

someone who knows how to please, but sadly its proportions defeat me.

Meanwhile, D is also enjoying himself. He starts with a prawn and avocado tian with red pepper salsa and moves on to a magnificent main course of Barbary duck breast, its perfect pinkness contrasting with the dark cherries in the accompanying sauce. I suspect he doesn't notice such a charming nuance, but I savour its visual perfection from behind my aubergine tower.

We appreciate the attentive and good-natured service from a smiling team. Their boss is on duty tonight and we enjoy the chance of a chat with her. She's Marie McPherson, a couple of months into her dream job as hotel manager after five years as a maitre-d' on the QE2.

Marie explains that the restaurant is usually pretty full outside the winter months so it is always best for non-residents to book. It is incredibly popular for conferences and weddings, too, so the chef, Mike McKell, runs a busy and extremely productive kitchen.

We round off our meal with a pair of puds: fresh fruit in a brandynap basket for me and, surprise surprise, a crème brûlée for him. Delicious. Coffee and petits fours follow in the bar, where we agree that it's hardly surprising this hotel is so popular. We like its friendly atmosphere, we like the staff, we like the food, we even take quite a shine to the little indoor pool, but we must go home and leave this place to its lucky guests.

* Our three-course dinner for two, without wine: £43. 

