

The View review

Cassi Kingshott finds a little Continental expertise in the city centre



**The Gallery Café • Fisherton Mill • 108 Fisherton Street • Salisbury • SP2 7QY
01722 415121 • www.fishertonmill.co.uk**

Fisherton Street in Salisbury appears to be just like any ordinary high street but as you turn off into the courtyard leading to the Gallery Café at Fisherton Mill, it begins to feel a little more special. The old brickwork of the former grain mill – dating back to 1880 – looked warm and rather rural in the evening sunshine. The big wooden door stood wide open and it felt very rustic; just like walking into an old French farmhouse.

There are only 11 tables in the café area, which, on Dining Club evenings, is turned into a charming country-style private dining room. This dining style is more common in France and it's always a delight to stumble across such a restaurant when touring the French countryside. It's no less delightful in Salisbury. The best thing about a restaurant that is open only on special occasions is that you know everything is going to be entirely fresh, produce having been bought for the one night and cooked exclusively to order.

'The menu selection is small at the Gallery Café but perfectly balanced and seasonal'



Grilled fillet of brill with spiced lentils and green beans

The Gallery Café opens for dining 'every four or five weeks,' says co-owner Deborah Fox; judging by the full tables on the night we visited, it is extremely popular. Little votive candles helped create an intimate atmosphere and the tables were dressed very simply with white linen. Sheer black drapes separate the dining area from the surrounding gallery and art and craft studios, adding to the enchanting atmosphere.

We started with a lovely Kir Royale and appetisers of white bean and artichoke purée and stuffed olives with feta, served on a little wooden platter. The menu selection is small at the Gallery Café but perfectly balanced and seasonal. A special touch is the choice of aperitifs. In addition to the Kir Royale there was a fino sherry, for instance. The same applied to the pudding menu, which listed three recommended dessert wines. These are such considerate little touches. It really feels as though the restaurant strives to provide the best possible dining experience.

I followed my appetiser with Chartreuse melon with prosciutto and buffalo mozzarella, perfect for a hot summer's evening. My companion chose a spicier starter, Vietnamese-style salad with seared beef, chilli, lime and peanuts.

As tables are booked in advance for a single sitting at the Dining Club, there was no queue waiting for the tables, ensuring a relaxed dining experience. The surrounding conversation was lively but not overpowering, and friendly as the wine flowed. Deborah Fox runs front-of-house while Michael Fox, her husband, is head chef. Together they make very competent and welcoming hosts.

I chose grilled fillet of brill with spiced lentils and green beans for my main course, as I'd never before tried this fish. It was moist and melted deliciously in the mouth. The brown lentils were an enjoyable and fairly



Deborah Fox runs front-of-house while husband Michael is head chef

unusual accompaniment, more common in France. My guest selected roast pork fillet with sage, peas and Iberian ham – a little Spanish touch – and declared the pork succulent.

The evening was slowly moving on. It was still warm, so the doors remained open. Living in Britain, I find this a real treat, a reminder of hot holidays abroad. To further the analogy I chose chilled zabaglione with mascarpone and crushed amaretti biscuits to finish the meal. It was oh-so creamy and slightly frothy; the biscuit topping provided a perfect contrast of textures in the mouth.

My guest was slightly miffed as he too would have liked zabaglione, but knowing that I like to try more than one pudding, he chose chocolate truffle tarte with clotted cream and raspberries. It was an excellent choice and all was forgiven.

Fellow diners lingered over their coffee and the remains of their wine. Gradually, people drifted away and the Gallery Café finally closed its doors... a little piece of authentic rusticity in the centre of Salisbury. **V**

Our meal for two, without drinks, came to around £62