

The View review

Rosemary Staal
*is spoilt for choice
by a menu master*



The Glasshouse Restaurant • Pikes Hill • Lyndhurst • Hants • SO43 7AS • 02380 286129
www.theglasshousedining.co.uk

For a couple of days before D and I are due to eat at The Glasshouse I have been nipping on to their website to study the menu. As pastimes go it is a bit futile, sad even, but staring at an incredibly attractive menu doesn't hurt anyone and, even in our PC-obsessed culture, food porn and the obsessive studying of same is not yet an arrestable offence.

In the car on the way to the restaurant, D admits that he too has been visiting the menu (though not as frequently as I have, needless to say) and he has already chosen what he is going to eat. I haven't, of course, for despite being by now extremely familiar with the set menu of five starters, six mains, four desserts and selection of cheeses, and quite probably capable of reciting them if required, I simply cannot choose. Under these circumstances it does seem a shame one can't just sit down and trench steadily through it all, leaving difficult decisions for those moments such as which way to turn for home when we drive out of the car park.

Happily, that's a problem we can leave for later, as we are here now, just on the outskirts of Lyndhurst in the heart of the New Forest. The Glasshouse is aptly named: an imposing mainly glass structure like a grand conservatory on one side of the Forest Edge Hotel. It makes a very attractive setting for a meal, with its dark wood floor, well-spaced tables set with black napery and white plates, unobtrusive lighting and enough shiny surfaces of glass and steel around to give it the 21st century look. The tables soon fill up and we learn from the incredibly busy and efficient restaurant manager Matt Magee that fewer than half the diners are staying at the hotel. That means the majority have made a journey, and an effort, to come and eat here. That's encouraging.

The restaurant opened last June, since when

the hotel group's executive chef Richard Turner has overseen this menu that has so taken our fancy. He strongly believes in sourcing local ingredients whenever possible and favours the fresh and seasonal over the (to me at least) less palatable and certainly less forgivable alternative. A Slow Food advocate, in other words – so I naturally worship at his table.

I'm sure he and the kitchen team must find it rewarding to source local food from a location such as this, with so much bounty on the doorstep. That said, I suddenly hear myself ordering Cornish mackerel for my starter, in a totally heart-over-head moment that, unsurprisingly, I have no reason to regret. The last Cornish mackerel I ate was one of a bucketful that friends and I caught and then immediately cooked in a bent and blackened pan on a boat one balmy evening circa 1974. So will my Glasshouse mackerel, all these years later, give me a Proustian



moment when it arrives not in a bucket but on a little tomato tart with Japanese horseradish? Sorry, can't answer that – too preoccupied just enjoying its gorgeousness and at seeing D's delight in his 'utterly perfect' seared scallops on butternut squash puree with lime, ginger and coriander.

There are so many taste sensations going on here, and there's such a range of contrasting textures on the palate that we agree that, even only one course in, we are on to something pretty special.

And so it continues. I rave over my goat's cheese and spinach risotto cake that sits, but not for long, on roasted young vegetables with aged balsamic, while D becomes equally rhapsodic about his aged New Forest sirloin with garlic wild mushroom, truffle mash and tempura onions. The word 'aged' is probably in the Top Ten adjectives favoured by menu-writers, we decide, being a more sensitive alternative to 'well-hung' – in respect of the meat if not the balsamic vinegar.

Can we manage a pudding? We look at the menu. No contest. We couldn't possibly quit while we're on a run like this. I eschew the chocolate options (Satan in a designer suit) and, while D surrenders himself to the pleasures of a coffee pannacotta with poached winter pear, I stay strictly local with a dainty cup of Burley cider ice cream that accompanies a spiced Bramley apple soufflé crumble. What a high to go out on.

The Glasshouse does food like this not just on Tuesday to Saturday evenings but for Sunday lunch too. That leaves only Mondays for the diet then.

Our three-course meal for two, excluding drinks: £60 V