

The View review

Rosemary Staal
*appreciates great food
in a 'smokeless zone'*

The Star Inn • East Tytherley • Lockerley • Romsey • 01794 340225 • starinn-uk.com



Really good food is all about the quality of the ingredients. It also has something to do with a cracking good chef who knows his craft. Put the right ingredients in front of Justin Newitt and his crew and what you get out of the Star Inn's kitchens is something extremely good. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that this is some of the best food I've ever eaten, and certainly the best in an establishment that has the word 'Inn' in its name.

This is not pub food, nor is the Star a pub. It calls itself, quite rightly, a 'Country Inn and Restaurant' – a 16th century gem well off the beaten track that offers a large serving of rustic charm with a side order of elegant sophistication. Add to this the fact that it's that rare and lovely beast, a totally non-smoking establishment, and you have a desirable destination for a lot of very happy eaters.

Justin, who is 27 and worked previously at the newly chosen 2007 Michelin Pub of the Year, The Bell, at Skenfrith in Monmouthshire, moved to the Star a year ago with his parents, Lesley and Alan, who run the front of house, the restaurant, the bar and the AA 4-star rated accommodation.

Perhaps the fact that the Newitts came to the Test Valley from Ludlow, the country's pioneer in the Slow Food movement and a mecca for food-lovers, accounts for their commitment to sourcing the freshest possible ingredients locally and concentrating on what's in season.

Although it is a high old time for game when D and I go to The Star, because it is Sunday lunchtime he wants roast beef. And that's what he gets, bless him – two fat red slices that cut like butter and, according to him, taste like beef used to taste in the good old days. He also gets a proper Yorkshire pudding and real meat-juice gravy with his vegetables.

Meanwhile, I am discovering the delicate pleasures of fillet of brill served with new potatoes, braised fennel and a beautiful saffron sauce. A deep-green spoonful of kale lends an inspired contrast in colour and texture.

We choose not to drink wine with our meal lest we fall asleep for the rest of the afternoon if we should leave this lovely beamed dining-room and go to relax in the leather sofas and armchairs beside the log

fire. Others, though, don't share our concerns and are very happily ensconced in the bar area, where the atmosphere is so conducive to gentle, ruminative chatter and unhurried relaxation.

Because we have chosen, reluctantly, not to have a starter (carrot and orange soup, Madeira marinated herrings, ham hock terrine or Cheddar soufflé) we can accommodate a pudding.

Being predictable souls, we go for our favourites: crème brulee for D (cappuccino crème brulee, no less) and home-made sorbet for me. Delicious, and so beautifully presented it seems – almost – a shame to broach them.

Service is remarkably good: two delightful girls look after us efficiently but notably without any hint of an obsequious attitude that makes me want to say 'Look here, it's only me'. These two are a real credit to Lesley Newitt, who is also taking her turn at waitressing. My word she works hard – but my word it's worth it.

Our two-course Sunday lunch for two, without wine: £32 ▼