

The View review

Rosemary Staal *reckons this is where two tums can meet their match*



The Three Tuns • 58 Middlebridge Street • Romsey • Hampshire • SO51 8HL • 01794 512639

The first thing that strikes me when D and I walk into the heavily beamed old Three Tuns is what a perfect place this would be to bring foreign visitors. 'Come with us to a typical English inn,' we could say. We'd install them in a comfortable corner, ply them with some of the really good real ales that are on tap and top them up with hearty fare from the kitchen. Visitors charmed, thirsts quenched, appetites sated. Job done.

But we have no visitors with us to impress, just our own hunger and thirst that need fairly urgent attention at the end of a busy and very cold day.

Happily, we are given a warm welcome by young Hannah Wilkinson, the proprietor, who took this place over late last spring with her partner, David Palmer. David is the chef so while he is busy in the kitchen we enjoy meeting Hannah and seeing her and her efficient team in action behind the bar and waiting at table.

Because they all smile so much and seem genuinely pleased to be at work here, we catch their mood and share their pleasure. It certainly is a nice place to be. I really like the

atmosphere and appreciate the interesting variety of chairs and tables, some of which, Hannah tells me, have been reclaimed but not over-restored. Uniformity and a touch of primness have their place, perhaps, but not in these slightly eccentric, higgledy-piggledy surroundings, where beams and copper and brass and old prints and nooks and niches set the comfortable tone.

Specials are chalked on a blackboard but my eye has already been caught by the first item on the printed menu: twice baked Rosary goats cheese soufflé. What I like about going out to eat is the escape from tiring chores (in other words, the cooking and the washing-up) and if someone is offering to cook me a soufflé, then bring it on. I've done enough soufflés in my time to know that they aren't as difficult as myth would have us believe, but I do like to pass the responsibility for making them light *and* tasty to more reliable hands than mine. I am impressed enough to crave another, but that would be silly as there's a lovely plate of Moroccan spiced vegetables with couscous and mint yogurt waiting in the wings.

Meanwhile, D is tucking in to his starter of seared scallops with little dollops of mash,

bacon bits and herb butter. He declined the chance to have black pudding with it too, obviously knowing he'd have to suffer another of my interminable lectures about animal fats and cholesterol. I know how to spoil a chap's few pleasures.

For his main course D has chosen roast duck with sticky red cabbage and drunken cherries. I fancy he just likes the adjectives, but in fact he likes the whole thing.

No puddings – we're not in elastic waistband mode tonight, but we tease ourselves with a look at the menu and feel rather smug, if very regretful, that we're not indulging in any of them.

Continuing the theme of what we might have had, we notice among the specials on the board that they offer bouillabaisse. It's very popular, Hannah tells us. I'm not surprised. That doesn't crop up very often in a pub, I bet, but then this is no ordinary pub. It's a pub that does quite adventurous, slightly different food in a big way, such as New Forest game pie with juniper and port, or home-smoked venison with quince chutney, avocado and bacon. That's belly-filling grub for hungry hunters if ever I saw it. Tables are filling up around us and we can see that anyone who hasn't booked is going to be lucky to get fed.

What a popular place – and what a busy kitchen David must run. He did his training in the Royal Navy, just like his Dad, who is working alongside him. I do hope they find time to splice the mainbrace.

Our two-course meal for two, excluding drinks: £39 **V**

