

# The View review

**Dia Newland** *discovers that even with the one you love, sharing isn't always easy*



**The White Horse Hotel & Brasserie • Market Place • Romsey • Hampshire • SO51 8ZJ**  
**01794 512431 • www.silkshotels.com**

Visitors to the abbey at Romsey have long had the pleasure of staying and dining at The White Horse Hotel & Brasserie. In fact there has been a hostelry on the site since the 1100s, although I suspect the board and lodging would have fallen mightily short of the standards to be found there today.

The Brasserie has a fresh, contemporary feel that complements the various reception rooms, which are comfortably elegant, inviting a further visit to sample afternoon tea. This evening, however, I am happy to settle in the dining room and sip the ice-cool Champagne offered on arrival and investigate the menu. Mmm.

Byron Hayter, the hotel's chef, trained at Sandbanks in Poole and greatly admires Blumenthal's dishes. I jokingly ask him whether he has a chemistry set in the kitchens. His answer makes me realise the depth of his enthusiasm to employ his



**Byron Hayter**

*'I admit that the reluctance to offer "tasters" is two-way'*

creative talent to scrutinise and marry ingredients, bringing out their flavoursome best. My expectations increase.

Deliciously moist and not large enough to spoil the appetite, we munch on various little handmade rolls of caramelised onion, four cheese, garlic and rosemary, and herb and shallot while we complete our choices. I choose to start with crab linguine, while my guest, pan-fried diver-caught scallops with pak choy, lemon grass and soy sauce. The crab linguine is served with a delicate creamy sauce, accompanied by tiny shrimps, and is surprisingly light. The scallops, delicious in themselves, are enhanced by the surrounding rich flavours on the plate. They disappear remarkably quickly and it is only by sleight of hand that I am able to try a small sample.

My main course of braised navarin of South Down lamb with buttered vegetables and parsnip purée follows. Fifteen hours of braising have produced a wonderfully deep flavoured navarin and the contrasting texture of the two tender pink chops stacked on top is a masterpiece.

The marinated Blackmore venison loin with fondant potato and juniper jus turns out to be just as good. By this time our sharing philosophy is becoming somewhat beleaguered and it takes a fair bit of encouragement to elicit a forkful of venison. It is probably the best venison I have ever tasted and well worth the persuasive powers required. I admit that

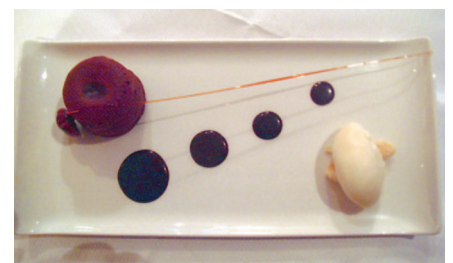
the reluctance to offer 'tasters' is two-way.

We choose soft, velvety David Moreno Rioja 2008 to drink with our meal. The White Horse has a good cellar and for those wishing to push the boat out there is plenty of choice. Staff are very helpful and more than happy to discuss both wine and food on the menu. Many of the ingredients are locally sourced, and we find the quality exceptional.

Anyway, the pudding menu arrives as we enjoy the last of the wine and the decision is made that we can both indulge. Very often on these outings, having enjoyed two courses, we share a pud, but that definitely isn't happening today.

An assiette of rhubarb and custard is my choice and as a treat I have a glass of dessert wine – Monbazillac. With a rhubarb shot, custard pannacotta, custard macaroon and rhubarb and custard ice cream I feel truly spoilt. John chooses warm Belgian chocolate fondant, which arrives looking as pretty as a picture. I don't push my luck, and let him enjoy it to the full. As the chocolate oozes out of the fondant he assures me it is quite as good as it looks and that the wine, Chateau Haut Roquefort, complements it perfectly. ♥

**Our meal, without drinks, came to £64.05**



**Warm Belgian chocolate fondant**