

The View review

Rosemary Staal
*finds modern English
cuisine in 15th century
surroundings*



The White Horse • Thruxton • Hampshire • SPI | 8EE • 01264 772401 • www.whitehorsethruxton.co.uk

Pub food, in my experience, usually has something of a ‘ping’ about it.

That’s the ping of a microwave or timer that tells the ‘cook’ that some boil-in-the-bag sludge of someone else’s making has reached the required temperature for serving.

D and I are going to the White Horse Inn for a meal. Should we expect the dreaded pub food? I scour their website and find, to my great relief, that we need have no fear. There’ll be no pinging going on here.

I also learn that our appetites are going to be in the care of Robert Probst, a chef with 30 years’ experience of cooking at a dining club in St James’s, London, where he earned many plaudits. Last November Robert teamed up with his former St Stephen’s Club business partner Lance Mawby, who had been retired for three years, to become chef-proprietor of the 15th century White Horse.

Leaving Robert to do the cooking, Lance, with his wife, Kelly, an expert in floristry (gorgeous fresh flowers in the super-clean ladies loo are much appreciated), and son

Ashley mop up the thousand and one tasks involved in transforming a modest country pub serving food into an elegant inn offering a fine dining experience. Only a few months into their task, Ashley says that all the numbers are going in the right direction.

Every table in the attractive, beamed dining room is taken on this Saturday night, although apparently we aren’t seeing it at its fullest capacity. The next day the dining area will be extended to accommodate the 70 who have booked for Mothering Sunday lunch.

Choosing what to eat is a doddle. This is because I have already seen the monthly menu on the website and I’ve had the whole journey to give the matter some thought. Showing uncharacteristic decisiveness I give my order: lentil and roasted pepper chowder followed by roasted pumpkin, tomato and basil risotto. I can’t wait. It sounds so far up my street we probably share the same postcode.

D is equally eager to get cracking on his shrimp and crab timbale with beetroot jus and medallion of beef with asparagus salad and Cognac sauce. It all sounds a bit wonderful and, once the first course arrives, we can see it looks wonderful, too.

After our first mouthfuls we exchange that rolling-eyeball look that translates as ‘Sorry, can’t talk for a minute, too overcome by what’s happening to me’.

I often make soup at home but have never reached the foothills, let alone the heights, of this chowder. I later learn from Robert, its creator, just before I sink to my knees in awe at his brilliance, that it’s ‘incredibly

simple’ (oh, I’m sure) and its ingredients include shallots and coriander stalks (‘that’s where all the flavour of coriander is’).

The shrimp and crab timbale earns a rattling good 10 out of 10 from D, who must adjust his marking system when he finds such perfection in his beef medallion that he has to resort to 11 out of 10.

Accompanying vegetables include batons of carrot presented like neatly tied bundles of kindling. I am charmed. I enjoy the contrast they make with the colours and textures of my risotto, which is better than any I’ve had this side of the River Po.

Puddings are a problem. Should we or shouldn’t we? Obviously we shouldn’t, so we do. D gives his arteries a last challenge before climbing back on the low-fat wagon with his choice of passion fruit brulée with hazelnut praline. If it’s the undoing of me, then this is a great way to go, he says, smiling happily.

I also throw caution to the wind by indulging in a bitter chocolate soufflé. It is served with a delicious parsnip ice-cream, which is as close as I am ever likely to get to a Heston Blumenthal experience. Robert-the-chef says the bread and butter pudding with toffee sauce would have been a great choice, too, ‘because it is so different – so light’. Maybe next time.

We really like this place. If the key ingredients for success are top quality food cooked with great flair and served in lovely surroundings with a warm, friendly atmosphere, then the White Horse is a winner by several lengths.

Our three-course meal for two, without wine: £52 **V**

