

# The View review

Dia Newland sails happily into port



**The White Star Tavern • 28 Oxford Street • Southampton • SO14 3DJ**  
**023 8082 1990 • www.whitestartavern.co.uk**

The White Star Tavern, a mix of restaurant, boutique hotel and bar, is right in the centre of a busy, cosmopolitan and vibrant part of Southampton; it is named after the White Star Line founded in 1869 and famous for Olympic-style liners such as the ill-fated RMS *Titanic* and the illustrious RMS *Queen Mary*.

So, it would not have been a surprise to find The White Star decorated in ‘liner style’ but, avoiding the obvious, the decor is stylishly eclectic. The bar area, long with clean lines, has several annexes which to all intents and purposes could be private drawing rooms filled with family and friends enjoying an evening together. The bar enjoys a different atmosphere and, with live music (from Kieron Cox on the evening we visited), people are drawn in from the street to join the lively scene. In the restaurant, set off-stage, so to speak, the mood is enhanced by all, yet distinguishable as a dining room.

The menu is simply set out, and although it has become something of a cliché, the chef actively sources genuine local ingredients. For instance, the soup is described as ‘seasonal? Yes. Local as possible and sometimes organic with buttered doorstep’. Often the name of the producer is included in the description. I

*‘Local as possible and sometimes organic with buttered doorstep’*

chose potted duck leg, pickled baby vegetables with sourdough toast. The duck was moist, chunky and full of flavour. Piled thickly onto the toast with the astringent spicy vegetable it was a great coupling. My partner decided on pan-fried gnocchi, creamed celeriac, roasted carrots and baked lemon dressing – one of the best vegetarian choices I’ve seen offered. The rich creamy sauce covering the smooth gnocchi, with a touch of lemon to finish, was a definite winner.

With the menu came a small addendum marked ‘Some late Additions’. There were two starters, ie, surf and turf: seared pigeon breast, braised Puy lentils and Bigbury Bay oyster, then, foraged mushrooms on toast with poached egg, and truffle oil. A shame I hadn’t paid more attention at the beginning, because both of these dishes also sounded well worth investigating. However, the main course offered here was pan-fried turbot, flaked crabmeat, chilli and leek linguine, and that, I was quick to choose. I wasn’t disappointed; the fish was flaky in texture and not overtaken by the crab and assertive chilli. John’s pheasant breast, Sunnyfields winter greens, New Forest chanterelles, and neeps and tatties, proved to be another sound decision.

I was lucky enough to talk to Stewart Hellston, The White Star’s chef, and discovered that a Hampshire chap himself, he channels his love of quality local ingredients into full-flavour dishes, which he feels is more important than chasing fine cuisine. His open-minded ethos produces stylish,

robust dishes that complement the vibrant, informal community that is The White Star Tavern.

After a suitable pause we investigated the puddings. I was rather pleased to find a selection of local cheese served with Fudges’ handmade Dorset biscuits and home-made seasonal chutney. Each cheese is given individual space on the menu, with description and price. It was such a treat to have the choice of either ‘filling your boots’ or sampling just one small wedge. I chose Looselanger’s White Hart Camembert-style soft cheese, rich and creamy. My pud-addicted partner decided on proper treacle tart, English raspberries and espresso ice-cream. A portion not for the faint-hearted, but finished with relish and a smile.

On Sunday, lunches are accompanied by live jazz, and besides roasts, lighter choices are available. After which I imagine a wander around the surrounding waterside area would complete a rather pleasant day. ✓

**Our meal for two, without drinks, came to £52**



**Chef Stewart Hellston, a Hampshire chap**

