

Derbyshire Life luncheon

The Bull's Head Repton

Seven unique and delicious courses, elegant wines, live music and stylish decor make this a luncheon to remember ... Amber Locke reports

Photographs by Andrew Eyley

I first visited the *Bull's Head* last year when it was still a building site and very much 'work in progress' but the palpable enthusiasm and excitement of Richard Pope the proprietor and David Humphreys the head chef were infectious. They enthusiastically described interior design ideas and their concept and philosophy for the pub and I got an inkling that this was going to be a venue with a difference! The progress of the pub re-development was even chronicled in poetry by the talented works foreman, Pete, and can now be read on the website!

Richard, his wife Loren and manager Neville Gaffney hosted our January Derbyshire Life Luncheon and had pulled out all the stops for us. Drinks were served in the bar area of the pub, which is a casual, relaxed space but with artistic touches – a funky cow hide panelled bar, glass wine wall and wall-hung quirky cow 'heads' made from old bicycle parts – and the meal was served in the slightly more formal upstairs restaurant.

When we entered the room we were in for a very pleasant surprise. Not only did it look amazing with thick curtains drawn against the lashing rain to give a cosy 'cocooned' feeling and tables adorned with spectacular, spot-lit towering flower arrangements, but there was also live music in the form of a jazz band! This glamorous, party-like atmosphere set the scene for the meal to come and we were wowed with a seven-course feast cooked for us by 26-year-old head chef David Humphreys and his team. A wonderful selection of complementary wines was provided by Nick Clemow of Bibendum Wine Ltd, and if only we hadn't all had to go home or back to our desks I think the event could easily and happily have spilled over into the evening!

David's menu began with a thick potato soup gently flavoured with garlic and topped with a crispy won ton filled with thyme-flavoured chicken. A refreshing Michel Laroche 2006 Sauvignon Blanc accompanied this and the fresh, mineral flavours paired well with the soft, delicate flavours of the soup. Mindful that we still had six dishes to come I reluctantly ate only a little of mine but would happily have devoured a second helping on another occasion.

The second course was more robustly flavoured: little fresh pasta tortellini stuffed with shredded oxtail and the plate dotted with a wild mushroom fricassée and maple-candied walnut halves. A pickled pear compôte completed the dish and its slight acidity cut beautifully through the richness of the other components, giving a wonderful balance of rich, savoury



MENU

Potato and garlic soup with chicken and thyme won tons
Sauvignon Blanc, Michel Laroche 2006 (Vin de Pays d'Oc, France)



Oxtail and walnut tortellini, wild mushroom fricassée and pickled pear compôte
'Pinossimo' Pinot Noir, Bouchar d'Ainé et Fils 2005 (Vin de Pays d'Oc, France)



Bitter sweet apple sorbet
Red mullet, cauliflower and fennel à la grecque, Parisienne potatoes and Ras el Hanout caramel
Domaine d'Astros, Vin de Pays des Maures Rosé 2004



Saddle of venison, kohlrabi fondant, celeriac purée, merchant du vin sauce
Preece, Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 (Victoria, Australia)



Caramel, pineapple and macadamia praline mille feuille
Château Levant, Sauternes 1998 (Bordeaux, France)

Local cheese board, house chutneys and relish
d'Arenburg, Vintage Fortified Shiraz 2004 (McLaren Vale, Australia)

and delicate, sweet flavours. A fabulous Bouchard Aîné et Fils 2005 'Pinossimo', Pinot Noir was poured and this intensely ruby-red coloured wine with its blackcurrant and cherry flavours and a hint of spiciness made this dish the perfect winter comfort food. All we needed was a roaring log fire to eat it by.

Flagging slightly with a combination of the warm cosy atmosphere, soothing music and great food and wine I could easily have settled down for a little snooze at this point but the next course of a bitter-sweet apple sorbet soon enlivened everyone. This palate-cleansing dish was elegantly served in champagne flutes and although ours was still a little frosty, I understand that by the time it had been served to the table on the other side of the room this had tempered to a spoonable consistency. The sorbet was topped with small spicy-sweet, chewy pieces and there was much discussion on our table to try and identify what these were. A question to David later identified them rose petals candied with tarragon and chervil – not the answer we'd come up with but intriguing none the less!

An elegant dish of red mullet was served next. This comprised a beautifully cooked piece of fish with cauliflower and fennel 'à la Grecque', dinky Parisienne potatoes and a Ras el Hanout (Moroccan spice) caramel. To accompany this a crisp pretty rosé wine was served – Domaine d'Astros, Vin De Pays des Maures Rosé 2006 – which had hints of pink grapefruit, redcurrant and herbs and gave the course a fresh summery feel.

The next dish was my absolute favourite: tender, juicy slices of saddle of venison which were overlapped, petal-like, around a fat disk of kohlrabi (cooked in the style of a fondant potato) with a smear of celeriac purée and a merchant du vin sauce. A lovely rich, ripe Australian Cabernet Sauvignon accompanied this and

its lush, big fruity flavours balanced well with the robustness of the meat.

Our sixth course was dessert: a mille feuille of fresh pineapple and gooey caramel sauce and little chewy squares of macadamia praline topped with a silky layer of chocolate. Teamed with this was a glass of honeyed Château Levant Sauternes, 1998 and its peachy, apricot aromas and spicy vanilla finish worked well with the fruity tones of the pudding.

As time had run on a few people had to leave before the cheese course, which was a shame as they missed out on a lovely local selection served with wafer thin slices of fruit and a fabulous spicy fortified Shiraz wine – a delicious, decadent and fitting ending to what had been an extravagant dining marathon!

The Bull's Head is certainly a pub with a difference and the effort and attention to detail that had gone into preparing our luncheon showed the absolute dedication and diligence of the hard-working team here. This is certainly one to watch and I think the Bull's Head will always have one or two fabulous surprises tucked up its sleeve to delight its customers! □

FACT FILE

The Bull's Head, 84 High Street, Repton, Derbyshire DE65 6GF
Tel: 01283 704422

www.thebullsheadrepton.co.uk

Opening hours: Daily 11.30am to midnight, meals served lunchtimes and evenings. Sunday roasts available until 9pm.

The Suppliers:

Wine Merchant: Nick Clemow, Bibendum Wine Ltd.

Tel: 07890 277 021



Kat Jacquin, Mike Starzec and Julie Collins



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