

THE SPECIALS BOARD

ANDY COOPER serves up his recommendations for dining out



The joy of having done this job for almost ten years now is that, even when I think I have discovered all the fabulous dining spots the county has to offer, something still pops up and gives me a very pleasant surprise.

A classic case in point is The Thatched Tavern at Maidencombe. Now, locals will no doubt be rolling their eyes at this juncture. THEY will have known what a super spot this pub is already. But for the unaware amongst us, a turn down the rambling lane on the outskirts of Torquay which leads to the pub leads one on a destination of delights.

On arrival, you get the sense of something special. The magnificent garden and outdoor decking area outside is festooned with twinkling lights and palm trees abound. It was winter when we visited but it still felt like a lovely place to spend some time in.

So that was outside; already a pleasurable experience. Stepping inside, matters did not disappoint either. Staff were warm, attentive and had that 'nous' you experience when it's

Maiden adventure

clear they have been trained well. The décor is modern, stylish and tastefully done.

We headed for our appointment with the menu. Matters started well on the drinks front, with some lovely options, including a mulled negroni - just what I need to shake off the winter chill.

Onto the food and it was clear head chef Liam Murray and his team were producing the kind of fare which backs up the effort from elsewhere in the place. My house made chicken liver parfait, mulled wine, poached figs, candied walnuts and sourdough crisp breads was a lovely mixture of tastes and textures, whilst Lady F - something of a scallops expert - was delighted with the elegance and creativity of the pan-fried scallops, parsnip puree, crispy parsnip, pickled raisins and pancetta jam she ordered.

For the mains we could have

deliberated long into the night, but staff had homes to go to, so I opted for the halibut fillet, buttered leeks, braised salsify, celeriac fondant, truffle and chive cream, which promised much and delivered on every level. Fish simply cooked, with plenty of flavour accompaniments - something in my experience which chefs do not always get right.

Across the table, it looked to me like the wild mushroom orzo, roasted shallots, chestnuts and parsley sauce would have been equally pleasing on the palate and Lady F confirmed this: it was beautifully cooked and tasted amazing, she affirmed.

Dessert choices offered plenty of pondering points, but we opted for two spoons and the vegan coconut panna cotta, roasted pineapple and candied lime... wow, that was a marvellous mix of the not-too-sweet with innovative use of ingredients.

So, a properly perfect ending to a special evening's visit. By my calculation, I must have driven past the turn to Maidencombe dozens of times over the years. I won't be rushing past in a hurry ever again. ♦

thethatchedtaverndevon.co.uk

THREE MORE TO TRY...

Art on a plate

The Broomhill Estate in North Devon will forever be associated in my mind with the 12-foot-high red stiletto sculpture outside. It



was the iconic symbol of the place when I visited for many years whilst living up there. The stiletto remains, but a lot has changed, with new owners and a change of emphasis in the kitchen. The hotel still boasts its amazing sculpture garden but the former gallery space has been converted into a restaurant where the real masterpieces are being created on the plates. broomhill-estate.com

Margoux on the move

"Where shall I eat in Exeter," people often ask me. "Margoux," I reply.

"Where?" they respond.

Now, normally I have to explain that this fabulous restaurant is tucked away down Mary Arches Street and is worth seeking out. Soon explanations as to its whereabouts will be easier, as I am pleased to say the team are moving to bigger premises in what was Jamie Oliver's restaurant in Princesshay. The move can only mean them getting bigger and better at what they do exceptionally already.

margoux.co.uk



Don't duck a great spot

It must have taken me about five attempts to dine at The Duck at Yeoford...but I am glad I persevered. It was

telling we could only get a last-minute booking for Sunday lunch at 2.30pm - the place was packed full of happy diners enjoying the brilliance of the food. We were already planning our return visit after we'd eaten the starters and next time we will be going by train - The Duck is just 50 yards from the station on the Tarka Line from Exeter to Barnstaple.

theduckatyeoford.co.uk

