

Dolphin House Brazzerie

The prospect of eating at the Dolphin House puts a spring in my step. I have never been disappointed with the food that comes from their chef. As he works on our starters today, he sends us tasty bits such as aubergine caviar, olives and crispy fried cockles. A jug of chilled water and glasses of Malbec wine are soon on the table and we settle to graze with smoked grill-charred bread while we wait.

From our home in Thurlestone, we go a little further than usual for this gem of a restaurant. It's located alongside the Sutton Harbour Marina in Plymouth - far enough from the Barbican's madding crowds to enjoy a peaceful ambiance. Scallops arrive at the table; they have a delicate flavour and are served with a tandoori chickpea bargee in a way that is classy on the plate and excellent on the palate.

I observe the restaurant's interior. A simple 'waterfall' of lights sparkles in one corner. There are overhead fans, wicker chairs and neatly upholstered wall seats. Enlarged panoramic photographs of harbour scenes and lighthouses hang on the walls.

Through the window we see dozens of 30 - 40 foot yachts, moored in the marina's prime harbour space. The back drop is of multi-story apartments and offices that overlook the Barbican, Plymouth Sound and the sea.

But let me tell of the food. Although they do fish and vegetarian fare, for the main course I choose duck breast with confit leg parcel and potato fondant. It is extremely good. Rump steak with wilted and crisp spinach leaves, fondant potatoes and jus is a perfect alternative.

A table by the window is a good place for people watching. Tram lines on the cobbled street imply it was once a cargo off-loading scene. Stone bollards there, so typical on a quayside, are the original mooring bollards. Professionals from the apartments come here for dinner as do sailors who call in for breakfast too. A sailor in a striped shirt and Breton cap passes by pushing a trolley loaded with his gear - fenders and other nautical accessories.

Only once before have I tasted vodka sorbet. It was at the Lizard Lighthouse gift shop and is indelibly imprinted on my memory as an extraordinarily good frozen confection. I had it again here with my chocolate fondant desert, but can also vouch for the ginger sponge and poached rhubarb that's served with toasted marshmallow ice cream.

I peer into an aquarium on my way to the loos and see exotic fish that swim in slow motion. The indoor fish tank compliments the restaurant's relaxed mood and fish eye me through the glass, hopeful that I may have a tit-bit for them.

Nearby eating places closed down while The Brazzerie survived the recession. Les Routiers selected them for the "Restaurant of the Year award 2014" in recognition of providing consistent exceptional service and hospitality. This year, head chef Nick Cottrell won the Craft Guild of Chefs Rising Star Award. It follows that their motto from Aristotle is: "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit."

We leave, happy to have had a memorable dining experience and walk just three minutes to Bretonside car park for our car.

We found a special deal with Travelzoo on the internet, but prices on the menu card are like this: Starters range from £5 to £8. Main courses £14 to £19 with sides if you choose added on for £3. Deserts £5 to £7. For more information, take a look at their website

www.dolphinhousebrazzerie.co.uk or call 01752 254879.