

First & Last Bistro. Restaurant & Wine Lounge. Ermington

There's something very warming about a visit to First & Last in Ermington. This wine bar and bistro's long-standing success continues in the hands of the present owners. The restaurant's conversion, from a pair of sixteenth century cottages, has an elegance that's complemented by white table linen and orchids.

Old ceiling beams and the glow of a gas fire in the lovely stone hearth, are central to the scene. Simple wall lighting brings pleasant warmth to the ambiance along with decorative art. Oil on canvas by Nichola Allen and other artists, was displayed in view of our table. It's a welcoming setting for dinner.

I began with beautifully presented and absolutely delicious garlic-infused mushrooms. King prawns, in a sweet chilli tomato-based sauce, was another starter at our table and it more than satisfied the palate. After such robust beginnings how would what followed match up?

The lamb rump didn't disappoint. It was all that was written on the menu card: 'A tender, medium rare roasted rump of lamb served with gratin potatoes, mint and thyme jus and a trio of fresh vegetables'. This chef can cook. And the presentation of each dish impressed us enough to remark on it. Without being intrusive, the friendly service included offers of 'more vegetables?' 'extra gravy?' as we enjoyed the food.

The Tarragon Chicken, Creedy Carver Duck, Goujons of Fish, Wild Sea Bream, Nut and Vegetable Roast, Vegetable Stack and, Fillet of Beef, were all written explicitly for diners to know what would be on the plate. There was a good selection even for vegetarians. The chef is known to come out of the kitchen to say hello to diners. Chardonnay and a full-bodied merlot sat well with our dinner. And there was a variety of local beers, ciders and spirits.

Along with lime mousse, raspberry roulade and other popular desserts, were old favourites that have stood the test of time, such as Spotted Dick, Syrup Pudding.

Low music had the sound of a Greek Isle for a while, then jazz and, as the tables became occupied, it was in occasional lulls that the strains of music came through the hum of conversation. Was it an accordion that we heard in a lull? We couldn't be sure but our companion said it was definitely music or his tetanus was getting worse!

The way out of the restaurant took us through a sunken lounge - the cosy casual space of the wine bar.

New and fragrant, attractively-styled toilets are near the exit for the ample car park. There is also an outside patio area, ideal for a predinner drink. I am thinking ahead to our next visit. Sunday lunch. I anticipate that it will be excellent.

This Devon country cottage restaurant is good reason for eating out locally.

Their number 01548 830 671