



Browns Restaurant Still 'All about the food'?

Returning to Browns Restaurant after 7 months of closure, I must admit carried an air of trepidation. Many thought it would actually be a victim of the elements and the owners would perhaps give up the battle against the on-going flooding, and put it up for sale for some stylish riverside apartments for the influx of high spending upwardly mobiles, moving to Worcester.

Thankfully this is not the case. Instead, they have re-opened and raised the stakes by installing state of the art flood defenses, as well as initiatives to remove the furniture, and even lift the new kitchen equipment from the rising tides all 'at a moments notice'...So what of the food, and the new 'Browns Restaurant Experience'.

The advertising all states that Browns is 'All about the food' – this sets the bar high. On entering, we were struck by the opulent décor, rich cream walls, and an eclectic mix of pictures and paintings – more about those later. The new furnishings add a more soft approach to the décor, whilst the **original red leather chairs have been saved**, almost all else has been replaced. All the 80 covers were set with a myriad of glass-ware, new shiny cutlery, and fresh white crockery, set on crisp white linen – The food needs to be good, if that is what Browns is all about, and not the décor!

We were greeted by Richard Hill, the long serving, familiar and very capable manager, who recognised us, and was clearly proud of his new domain, and pleased we had returned. He was also keen to show us upstairs to the new mezzanine level cocktail bar – a much improved use of this area, with a bar installed at the far end, the introduction of a mix of lime green tub chairs, as well as low stools, tables, and fixed seating – all with a back drop of the artworks. The drinks list offers a range of reasonably priced cocktails and 'mock-tails' as well as straight spirits, and 8 wines by the glass. We chose a glass of the French Sauvignon Blanc, Domaine de la Prade, £6.00 for a large glass, and my guest chose a 'Berry Brown' cocktail (Gin, raspberries, strawberry syrup, lemon juice & lime juice) £7.

Back to the artworks – Cards on the tables explain that they have given the opportunity for local schools and colleges to showcase their students' artworks, and we have the chance to purchase such works, with the funds going directly back to the schools and colleges. A great way of showing some of the counties talent, in such a stunning setting.

From the mezzanine, looking down into the restaurant with its large arched window, we commented how Browns appears as a 'Cathedral to Food' – With the diners appearing as 'worshippers' seated below, coated in the windows' reflections and colours from the river Severn cast onto each table.

With the introduction of an A La Carte menu as well as a Table D'Hote, the customer now has more culinary choice and can choose how little, or how much to eat, and indeed spend. **The new sharing plates also available in the Mezzanine Bar** offer choices like Grilled marinated vegetables with hot boccocini, hummus, pesto and sour dough or there is the Charcuterie Plate with pickles, olives, sun blushed tomatoes and home breads, from £7-10 each.

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We were presented with the new restaurant menus which offer a wide range of especially created dishes – suffice to say we were 'spoilt for choice!'

It is clear that Executive Chef Martyn Lovell, has worked closely with his team **headed up by Ian Courage, both from The Lygon Arms, as well as Peter McGreggor who is from equally well respected Mr Underhills' Michelin restaurant of Ludlow.** Well balanced and crafted, the menu choice is broad, including a selection of ingredients from across the region.

Starter dishes included Shellfish ragout, with fennel cream, crab beignet, chervil veloute £7.95, the Seared 'Valley Smoke House' smoked salmon and salmon tartare with hot goats cheese, pickled cucumber and caraway bread £7.50. Some old Browns favourites have also remained including King prawn and Parma ham brochette with spiced aioli which was chosen by my guest, from the Table D'hote. My preference was the South coast diver caught scallops, free range pork belly, cauliflower puree and Browns black pudding with Herefordshire Perry jus £10.95 – I later learned that the 'Browns black Pudding' is created by the team, and has a rather special 'secret ingredient'.

For mains, the choice was equally as hard, torn between the Poached halibut, oyster ravioli, etupee of leeks, horseradish veloute £18.50 or the John Dory fillet, potato crust, purple sprouting, fresh cockle barigole £22.50 – I chose the latter and my guest chose the Braised hake fillet with celery leaf, salsify, shallots and pancetta off the table D'hote, though I understand it was a close call between that and the Lemon sole with parsley and lemon beurre noisette – though 'All about the food' Browns is certainly not all about fish, with an equally wide range of meat dishes, including free range woodland pork, braised cheeks and tenderloin with sage beurre noisette, parsnip fondant, apple and date puree and I must admit the English dry aged beef fillet, Browns pommes frites and haricots verts looked fantastic on the rectangular plates, but carries a £6 supplement on the Table D'hote. There is also a comprehensive vegetarian menu available.

The wine selection was easier – though the list is extensive (not surprising as the Everton's who own Browns are well respected wine merchants) the choice was easy as my guests' 'wine of the moment' is the Coto de Imaz Rioja, though red would not always be my choice with fish, it seemed a good selection. £24.50.

We were shown to our table, seated overlooking the river, in a cosy corner. The wine was presented, and decanted – a welcome addition to the service. A selection of homemade breads also arrived. These were accompanied by **an entree 'with compliments of the chef'** by way of 2 shells containing rich smoked trout with dill – a welcome flavour hit, after so much drooling.

The starters did n't disappoint either, the 'Browns Classic' of the King prawn and parma ham brochette, was generous with the prawns, and well dressed, and a light flavour. The scallops on my dish were thinly sliced, and the pork belly sweet and tender, was sat on top of the home-made Browns black pudding – that too being sweet and moist, with a delicate flavour, I am sure coming from that secret ingredient.

All the time there was a real buzz of other 'food worshipers' enjoying their Saturday evening, in what was almost a full restaurant, not bad after only one week of re-opening – good news travels fast. Lots of staff were busy taking care of diners, and providing attentive, and informed service, without being too obtrusive or overbearing. **The mains soon arrived,** both presented on dramatic, deep set white plates. The hake was perfectly cooked and complimented by the light cream sauce, and crispy pancetta . My John

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Dory fillet sat proud atop the cockle shells, lightly poached on steamed spinach. The side veg was a mix of baby turnips, green beans, served al dente all also on a bed of spinach – surprisingly the same veg selection as on my main, but I guess that was down to my selection, rather than the norm. **The cockles were clearly fresh, firm, and juicy**, and the fillet light with the tender flakes of meat working well with the strong cockles.

To the puds – Never a HUGE puds fan, but always keen to indulge, we decided to swap menus – I went for the Cheese trolley from the Table D'hote and my guest the equally aptly named “Bananas and Chocolate” £7.50. Both accompanied by a glass of Brown Brothers Orange Muscat and Flora £6.95. There is a choice of 9 desserts, all sounding rather indulgent such as Caramelized pear and pine nut tart, lemon cinnamon sabayon, honey and vanilla mascarpone, or Omelette Rothschild with rhubarb, vanilla crème fraiche ice cream to name but two – all desserts off the a la carte are around £7-8 each, with the cheese trolley being £9.95.

The cheese trolley, a main stay of Browns, arrived, and I was presented with the detailed cheese menu, and at the same time, talked through each by the waiter, the selection concentrating on English and French cheeses. I made my selection, and he presented me with generous cuts of each, as well as fresh grapes, and selection of biscuits, and home-made breads. Perfect temperature, texture and combinations, this was a fine conclusion to what was a very appetising meal. The Bananas and Chocolate I am informed was no disappointment either – perfect in presentation, and flavour – especially the chocolate and banana fondue, which I must admit, I stole a spoonful, and was rather nice.

So is Browns “All about the food”? I think considering that it is a new team, brand new décor, and been closed for over 7 months, it is about a little more than just that.

Opening Times

Tue-Sat Lunch 12-2pm

Tue-Sat Eve 9-9.30pm (Drinks to 11pm)

Sunday 12-3pm

Contacts

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