



restaurant review

The Arboretum

The Cornwall Hotel Spa & Estate, Pentewan Road, St. Austell, PL26 7AB. Tel: 01726 874050. www.thecornwall.com

Reviewed by **Jessica Milln**

Some menus are written to impress or bewilder. Others are distinctly French, Italian or even 'fusion' in flavour. Methods need to be translated and dishes explained in dialogue that entices enthusiastic responses. But at The Arboretum in St Austell, head chef Tom Bradbury's English dishes were presented as lists of ingredients, nothing more, in the most straightforward way a menu can be. Without the ritual of appetite seduction, I felt abandoned to an objective rational. Who'd have thought a lack of description could leave me so underwhelmed. "I'll try the lamb," I opted, "Not had that for a while."

I selected – with my rational head - for starters, a tasty chicken and smoked bacon terrine that sang in baritones alongside a powerful horseradish mayonnaise, following with a shoulder of spring lamb, adorned with a vivid green cravat of wild garlic leaves, shiny buttons of roasted shallots and ball of mashed potato sprinkled with tiny garlic flowers. From the first mouthful, my heart was singing Hallelujah. My husband's choices were more delicate and subtle. He picked soused mackerel that was so fresh it glistened. A work of art yet appearing casually constructed, "I could eat that all day," he declared. Afterwards came ling with a crust of lemon, some crunch of radish, creamy potatoes and bisque that was too good for words.

We spoke to Tom after our meal – now fervent devotees to his culinary skill – to

heap praise and ask trivial questions. "How can you serve a shoulder of lamb," asks I, "and make it look like a slice of cake?" The menu had made the food seem uncomplex. Tom's description of marinating the soused mackerel in an escabeche and slow cooking lamb for eight hours, vacuum-packed in a sous-vide water bath, had my head reeling even without the help of half a bottle of Chilean Sauvignon Blanc.

For dessert, our unobtrusive yet attentive waitresses strongly recommended the dark chocolate mousse, honeycomb, caramel ice cream and pistachios. Now we were salivating. My husband quickly plumped for it, while I chose a lovely, creamy, vanilla panacotta poised over a sharply acidic passion fruit and orange jelly.

The Cornwall has been open for just over a year. The interior style, in the old White House – the Georgian country mansion that forms the focal point - is respectful to the hotel's early 19th-century roots but not wrapped up in them. You feel pretty sure that our ancestors would applaud the design twist that has brought the look and feel of classic styling bang up-to-date. But while the Cornwall is also elegant and alluring from the roadside, is there a mistake in its name? When a place styles itself The Cornwall it must embody everything that Cornwall is. With my mind at once gravitating to old mines and glorious coastlines, somehow a rural mansion, in a wooded estate, is not immediately all things Cornwall. Perhaps, then, people might be left perplexed, a little puzzled by The Cornwall's character. Similarly, the name of its delightful 2AA Rosettes restaurant: The Arboretum had me thinking I'd be encountering a tree or two.

But The Arboretum should put St Austell firmly on the gastronomes' map. The service was excellent, the food superb and at £29 for two courses and £35 for three, it's also very affordable. It plugs a gap in mid-Cornwall for the type of exciting, fresh and modern fine dining that the rest of the county is rapidly developing a reputation for.

Will we eat here again? Yes, there's no doubt at all. The Cornwall might not be absolutely all things Cornwall (well, to me anyway), but The Arboretum is a fantastic place to eat. Simple, you see. 