

EATING OUT

The Restaurant

They call it The Restaurant at Ribby Hall. I'd be tempted to call it THE Restaurant. It's a place which makes its own event, creates its own sense of time, place, and identity. It's smart, stylish, service impeccable, food fabulous, staff and ambience warm and welcoming. We've dropped by on spec, early doors, barely time to smarten up - and this is one restaurant to treat with respect. Feeling careworn, in need of a pick-me-up, we're hesitant about being first through the door but peer in and find other early birds. Phew, in we go, warm welcome, drinks proffered, menus and surrounds studied, admired. It's all elegant informality, attention to small details which make a big difference. No wonder so many book a break here, but it's a restaurant open to all, and which would enhance any high street or city centre.

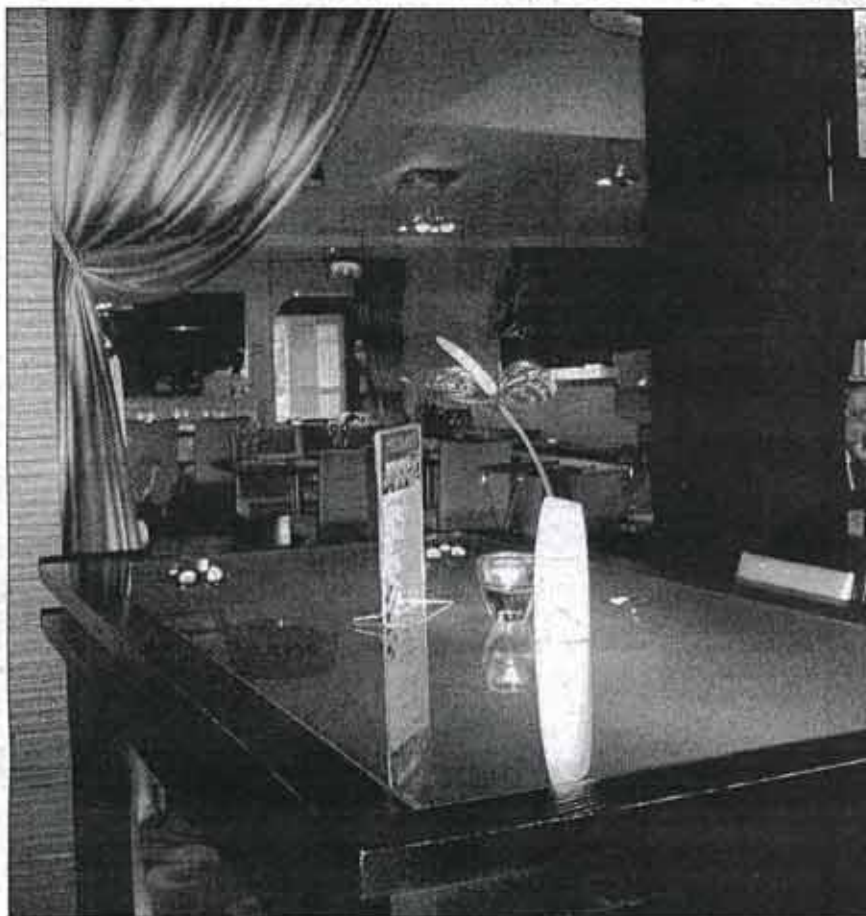
It's just after 5pm, and I haven't eaten this early since I had kids in tow; it's slightly disorientating, like that feeling of emerging from the dark magic of a theatre matinee to find the sun still shining outside.

It's heartening to find the staff sunny and upbeat, their mood lifting spirits, encouraging us to make the most of this dividend, the extension of our evening out. A young couple steal kisses, a family trade confidences there's a young persons' menu too so kids don't feel excluded. Alongside, an elderly mother and daughter discuss the menu, the mum a little out of her depth, staff consulting both to see what can be adapted to please. It's that sincerity that makes the service stand out. Attention to detail extends across the operation. Chef Andrew Birch, a Michelin-veteran, is passionate about local produce, painstakingly prepared. It's also nice to rediscover seasonal produce in its time and place again.

The table d'hôte menu is exceptional value, £20 for three courses. The choice is excellent, and innovative. There's a la carte and tasting menus and real treats in store for the festive season, and specialist theme nights. The wine list is wonderful, a gratifying range of prices to suit budgets.

We open with salad of caramelised baby pears, spiced walnuts, Lancashire blue cheese - available as a main course too. The tangy melt in the mouth cheese is the perfect foil for fruit and nuts, the dish a triumph of complementary rather than competing flavours. And if that works well, try rolled terrine of ham hock, guinea fowl, smoked garlic puree and organic hen yolk! Accompanying rolls are warm, tasty, a tweak on a farmhouse kitchen treat.

My companion chooses roasted sirloin of Lancashire beef, peppercorn sauce, and girolles (mushrooms). The meat is cooked to medium rare perfection, on request, but the girolles are rolled aside, so I nick them, enjoying the delicate yet



FACTFILE

Name: The Restaurant
Address: Ribby Hall Village, Ribby Road, Wrea Green, PR4 2PR
Telephone: (01772) 671155

Website: www.ribbyhall.co.uk

Opening times: Mon-Sat 5pm-9.30pm, Sun noon-3pm, 5pm-8.30pm

Booking: Advisable but not necessary

Parking: On site

Disabled access: Accessible throughout
Vegetarian options: Excellent

Value for money: 9/10

Life! rating: 9/10

flavoursome, vinaigrette infused taste. My selection of fish and shellfish, with herb Nage, a herby vegetable stock, and pancetta, is one of the most delicious dishes I've tasted. And if that's not enough to ensure a repeat booking on the spot, try chocolate three ways (coconut, rum and chilli) or my partner's caramelised banana bavarois, peanut



butter ice cream with a kick from fresh coriander.

All that and Sandford Estate Shiraz and restorative espressos for around £60? Marvellous. Just one comment: change the music, I can only take Sam Barber's Adagio three times in one evening...

Jacqueline Morley

WINECORNER

by Jacqueline Morley



All that sparkles isn't champagne - and frankly it's often rather better. Take Spain's best kept bubbly secret, Anna de Codorniu, known to native fans simply as Anna.

Here in the UK it's been a bit of a cult, confined to those in the know, available at select regional independents (around a tenner) but the good news is it's become part of Sainsbury's new Discovery range, aimed at the more adventurous wine drinker, looking for authentic wines, for £7.49 until November 31!

It's well worth the voyage of discovery with Anna de created to honour the last Codorniu heiress who married the viticulturist Miguel Raventos in 1659. It's equally heartwarming to note the company is still family owned and run by the Raventos family who have retained the Anna name as a world renowned brand.

It was a pioneer of its time, the first Spanish sparkler to blend Chardonnay (70 per cent) with an equal mix of traditional grape varieties Parellada and Macabeo/Xarel-lo, and has a lovely balanced body, aromas of tropical and citrus fruit, soft elegant citrus notes on the palate, great freshness and good length, a worthy (and frequent) award winner.

If that doesn't pop your cork, Bodegas Bilbainas Vina Poma Centenario Crianza 2006 will, a gloriously refreshing ripe cherried plug from a new vintage (one of the best years) from one of the oldest wine estates in the Rioja Alto. Available in Majestic as part of the Spain promotion, cracking value at £6.74 when buying two bottles, until

November 1, so stock up now for Christmas! **FAB FINDS:** I love the branding of Ravenswood Vintners Blend, from California, with its twist on contemporary Zinfandel, brighter, brasher and bolder than its insipid American cousins, and packing a fair old clout too; at 13.5 per cent alcohol volume. The emphasis is on easy drinking unpretentious wines so the 2007 is good value at £7.99 from Tesco, Spar, Waitrose and www.everywine.co.uk. Plummy and bramble fruited treat, spices, peppers, and fairly full bodied. **WHAT'S NEW:** There's been a sleek boutique wine tweak of Deen de Bortoli's Vat 12 Sangiovese 2008, 13.5 per cent, from Australia, the series named in honour of one of Oz's great wine pioneers, De Bortoli's having been established back in 1928, but the packaging really getting a lift from the contemporary presentation. Nice tribute indeed.

Don't forget to send your booze news, clubs, favourite finds, swigs and tips to jacqui.morley@blackpoolgazette.co.uk



TOP TIPPLE

For a lovely sweet treat try the aptly named Berry Bros & Rudd Sauternes 2005, 35.5cl, £12.25, online at www.Bbr.com, a perfect pud wine. Good sweet wines can be hard to find for a sensible price but this hits the spot with quince aroma and fresh acidity to keep it lively, even with a leaden dessert.