

# The Nags Head

Debra Aspinall dines at a Great Missenden pub with great expectations when it comes to accolades

I'VE BEEN HEARING AMAZING COMMENTS about the highly acclaimed Bricklayers Arms in Hertfordshire for several years, but as I have always reviewed Buckinghamshire and Berkshire restaurants, a professional visit seemed unlikely.

But in March this year the award-winning team behind the Bricklayers took over The Nags Head in Great Missenden, charmingly renovating the 15th-century building and transforming it into a foodie pub serving the same innovative English traditional and French fusion cuisine that made its sister the Dining Pub of the Year in The Good Pub Guide 2008.

Indeed as our genial host, Alvin Michaels (the head of the family which runs the two restaurants), showed me and hubby Kim to our table, he was keen for us to know that The Nags Head has already come into the radar of the AA Pub Guide and that he expects several accolades to be coming their way over the next few months.

So expectations were high as I perused the menu, which carried lots of things I could happily have sampled, as well as tempting items on the specials list. Sometimes one stomach just isn't enough.

I probably didn't impress Alvin when I ordered a bottle of Pinot Grigio to accompany our food. He's clearly passionate about his wine list and has managed to source some exciting bottles including some limited Ernie Els (yes, the golfer) and Mollydooker wines and some Cloudy Bay numbers which don't get anywhere near the usual High Street outlets. I'm afraid his enthusiasm was a little wasted on me, but I'm sure his list is appreciated by those in the know.

So back to the food. For me the yummiest-sounding starters were the pan-fried king scallops wrapped in parma ham and served on a bed of parsnip puree with a hazelnut drizzle; a mushroom feuillette of puff pastry topped with mushrooms in a calvados cream and vegetables julienne; and, from the specials list, a scallop and crayfish terrine with a lime and caper mayonnaise.

Hubby Kim chose the brochette of tiger prawns on a rosemary stick served with a seasonal vegetable stir-fry and a light curry cream. This was a wonderful combination of flavours. The



creamy curry sauce was on the side of the plate so he could dip the succulent prawns and coat them with as little or as much of the sauce as he preferred. The stir-fry veggies were cooked perfectly and added bulk but no weight to the dish.

I would have been jealous had I not been engrossed in my own starter: crab and home-smoked salmon served with chive cream and blinis. Again the sauce was on the side, this time on a Chinese ceramic spoon, which meant I could enjoy the fresh deliciousness of the seafood, or dip, as I saw fit. The salmon was actually some of the best I have ever eaten (and I've eaten at Loch Fyne... the actual Loch, in a salmon smokehouse, not just the restaurant).

My best friends will know that if duck is on a menu the other dishes don't get a look-in. Here it was offered to me confit (my favourite) and served with a sweet and sour orange jus. It was intensely rich, mouth-meltingly tender (with gorgeous crispy bits) and very, very tasty. It was also a tad too rich for me and I actually struggled to finish the not overly big portion because of the intensity of the orange.

Still, I would give the dish a high 9 out of 10. It was profoundly tasty (so were the accompanying creamy dauphinoise potatoes). Fish-lover Kim had opted for the grilled red mullet and halibut served with a scallop coral flan and a chardonnay sauce from the specials list. The generous portion was well cooked and tasty, the sauce light and an excellent accompaniment. The soufflé-like flan was probably unnecessary and quite very strongly flavoured as opposed to the subtle sauce.

Puddings here are rustic-sounding and include hot sticky toffee pudding; lemon tart; bourbon vanilla crème brûlée; and hot chocolate sponge pudding.

As befitting a gastro pub which is clearly aiming high, the prices are higher than your average pub restaurant, with starters ranging from £4.95 to £13.95, but most around the £8 mark, and mains £14 to almost £20 and all desserts between £5 and £7. But The Nags Head already has a devoted clientele who are willing to pay a premium for top notch grub.

**As Chic Chat went to print, The Nags Head was awarded an AA Rosette.**

The Nags Head is open from midday daily with the bar open all day throughout the year. Food is served from 12 - 2.30pm (12-3.30pm Sunday) and every evening except Sundays from 6.30pm.

It is advisable to book: 01494 8623200  
www.nagsheadbucks.com

