



Alice Eaton pays a visit to West Lodge Park to find out what its restaurant has to offer

Fine dining

ALL too often, hotel restaurants can get overlooked by diners, perhaps because it seems easier to go to an eatery you can pass by on the high street and peer into before deciding to enter, or simply because it can take a little courage to walk into a grand hotel where you are not staying and take advantage of the facilities.

If you have yet to make this step into the unknown, you really are missing a trick as more often than not, hotels adhere to a high standard that sets their restaurants apart from the competition.

With this in mind, we decided to try out the Cedar Restaurant at West Lodge Park in Hadley Wood. We approached the hotel via a sweeping, tree-lined drive at the end of which was ample parking, making it a short dash through the rainy night and into the entrance hall which had an inviting open fire welcoming all guests.

There is no obvious reception here but signs guided us down and along a corridor, eventually opening out into the bustling bar area, again with an open fire, where people were lounging on sofas enjoying a quiet evening drink or tucking into a plate of food.

A member of staff was on hand to swiftly show us to our table in the restaurant itself and a plate of homemade bread quickly arrived while we perused the menu. The restaurant is made up of two sections and is decorated with rich furnishings that tie in well with the stately feel of the country home. A pleasant painted mural stretched along one wall.

There were eight dishes on the starters menu and all sounded pretty appealing. I decided on the Shetland king scallops with braised oxtail, carrot and red wine that came presented like a work of art; three juicy scallops carefully arranged on a white plate alongside a small bowl of the sauce that provided a perfect balance to the fish. My dining partner decided on the butternut pumpkin soup after his initial choice of the foie gras was not ready to be served. This came in a delightful bowl with lid, drizzled with crème fraîche and came with shavings of crispy parsnips to sprinkle on top as an inventive alternative to croutons. The soup was smooth, creamy and wonderfully sweet and gave a welcome warmth against the cold winter night. Other starters

that caught our eye were avocado mousse with tomato, shallot, roasted garlic and a dill dressing and the game pie with a prune and Armagnac compote served with a bramble coulis.

To follow, I chose pan fried sea bass that came as two generous fillets that were juicy and bone-free. The fish was accompanied by sauté potatoes, Kalamata olives and sauce vierge that had a spicy kick and gave the dish a healthy punch. My partner had Denham Estate loin of venison that was pink and smoky in taste, with braised red cabbage, parsnip and an injection of sweetness with the inclusion of redcurrants. It looked fabulous and was quickly polished off. In hindsight, we should perhaps have ordered a side dish of carrots and French beans but overlooked this when ordering. Again, other dishes we could have had included fillet medallions of Aberdeenshire beef with parsley mash and a mushroom and pepper gratin and pan fried fillet of pork with spring cabbage and sage mash.

For the wine, we chose a passable 2004 Chateau du Pin, Bordeaux.

The proportions were ideal and we felt suitably well-fed at the end but had enough room for a cafetière coffee, which we decided to take in the lounge area, that came with a selection of delicious homemade chocolates. For those with a sweet tooth, the dessert menu offered among others a blackberry and sloe gin mousse, caramelised pear pudding with walnut and apple icecream, peanut butter iced parfait with raspberry jelly and a baked plum tartlet with fenugreek icecream and strudel. An impressive selection of cheeses was also available.

This was a delicious meal, with friendly, professional staff in pleasant surroundings. Well worth heading off the high street for.

West Lodge Park is located on Cockfosters Road in Hadley Wood. 020 8216 3900.

The Bill:

Scallops £10.50	Venison £24.50
Soup £6.50	Wine £18.95
Sea bass £20.50	Total (excluding service charge): £80.95

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