

Pan Haggerty, Queen Street, Newcastle

Jan 30 2009 (<http://www.journallive.co.uk/north-east-taste/restaurant-reviews/2009/01/30/>) by Geoff Laws, The Journal

ONE of the reasons to eat at a restaurant is when we're looking for something we couldn't cook at home.



Sometimes that's most evident in the presentation, food with all the frills. Cascades of dressed salad, dainty trails of sauce and spirals of spun sugar come to mind.

They rarely happen in our house because whenever I try to reproduce the finer points of presentation, they don't exactly enhance the dish. The cascades become a

mound, the dainty trail is more of a splodge and I don't even attempt the spun sugar.

Third degree burns followed by the Minor Injuries Unit lie thataway.

What's great is when you find a restaurant that not only serves sound food but also has a masterly grip on presentation and gets the balance right.

Pan Haggerty, off Newcastle Quayside, is one such. At 21 Queen Street – an address which for many years has been associated with fine food – from the very beginning to the moment we left, this was an excellent experience.

My first dilemma was which simply described dish to choose. They all sounded good and, as per usual, my companion helped by declaring her choices, so reducing the number by two.

Having followed in her wake, I sat back and enjoyed my first glass of Malbec, served at the perfect temperature. Everything boded well and I was beginning to feel at one with life.

Starters arrived and things got even better. The classic Northumbrian dish, pan haggerty, served with a perfectly poached duck egg, put a smile on my companion's face.

A savoury sandwich of sliced potatoes, onions and herbs topped with grilled cheese carried the globe white egg on top ready to spill yolk on demand and bathe the pan haggerty with egg goodness. Frills of dressed rocket for contrasting colour were the finishing touch.

My starter of roast wood pigeon with celeriac, apple and caramelised beetroot salad

matched it taste for taste. The cool, shredded celeriac, dotted with white mustard seed, provided a balanced base to the earthy, warm beetroot and pink-soft pigeon on top.

At this point I was full of well-placed hope that main courses would continue to carry the flag of honest-to-goodness food, and they did.

My deliciously slow-cooked overnight braised shoulder of beef was feather light and rippled away to the touch, yet held all the natural meaty juices anyone could hope for.

This very generous serving came with foamy mash and roasted scallions topped off with grilled lardons. This meatfest dish was everything it should be and more.

Across the table the steak and kidney pudding was managing to defeat my companion. I'd have liked to help out but I was already full.

The dome of suet pastry encased succulent braised steak and pungent, tight-grained kidney in a luscious gravy that spilled from the crust. Some great mash brought the carbs level to the maximum, with ripples of curly kale adding frou-frou greenness to the plate. Home cooking par excellence. The huge servings challenged every fibre of my being and a rest was in order before we could summon up the desire for dessert. I'm so glad we did because they were as superb as the other courses.

The date and walnut tart with toffee sauce and vanilla ice cream sounded like sugar gravity but this dessert defied the laws of physics. The tart was packed with oily nuts crinkling beside sugar-packed dates in a crumble-light pastry case.

The gloss of the toffee sauce glazed the plate and the rich creamy ice cream added the finishing touch to one of the best renditions of a super-sweet yet light tart.

The pear frangipane with vanilla ice cream came from the same school. The huge wedge of tart was enough for a family of four, but the deception lay in the lightness of the almond filling punctuated with roasted pear. Both would have floated away without an ice cream anchor.

From beginning to espresso end this was a remarkable meal that satisfied my appetite for honest-to-goodness food with just the right amount of presentation in very comfortable surroundings.

Tel: (0191) 221-0904

Open: Monday-Saturday 12 noon-2.30pm; Sunday noon-3pm; Monday-Friday 5.30-7pm; Saturday 7-10pm

Where is it? One block back from the Quayside.

First impressions: Warm glow.

Style, design and furnishings: Warm vermilion lighting aglow, exposed faux brick work, wooden flooring and good lighting create a relaxed comfortable setting.

Cuisine: Modern best of British.

Wine: Finca la Colonia, Malbec 2008, Argentine. Fine redcurrant/blackcurrant mix with depth. Well balanced and slightly dry, £17.

Service: Articulate, conversationally confident waitress at ease with herself and her customers. Very good standard of service all round.

Value: Food of this quality came at a very reasonable price of £85.03, including a 10% service charge.

Parking: You'll be lucky to find parking on the street. Your best bet is the Dean Street multi-storey.

Disabled facilities: Restaurant all right, toilets downstairs.