

The Cavendish

Faultless food served with immense charm in calm, traditional surroundings make the Duke's Hotel's recently opened restaurant well worth seeking out

On the Duke's Hotel website is a quote culled from *The New Prose Guide of 1778*.

"It is in Bath alone" (it reads) "where People of Fashion can step out of their Coaches after a long journey, into Houses or Lodgings, full as warm and as comfortable as their own."

Two and a quarter centuries later, this pretty much sums up the experience of dining at the hotel's Cavendish Restaurant, though now the 'long journey' has been replaced by a short walk from Great Pulteney Street, unless you've been particularly unlucky with the parking.

Elegance and comfort are the twin watchwords here, with the main dining area being housed in a splendid, softly carpeted Georgian drawing room. All is calm, all is light, thanks to the oversized windows; the only concession to the 21st century is the tape of loungey-jazz be-bopping away in the background.

As it happens, I hate loungey jazz with a vengeance. As we were the first diners to arrive, we wondered aloud whether there might be an alternative?

If our waiter's heart sank at the prospect of spending the evening with such querulous customers, he hid it manfully. He ran us through the alternatives. "Jamie Cullum?" he offered in the spirit of a magician producing a rabbit from a hat.

"Piano music, Richard Clayderman?" hazarded the hotel's head manager, gamely entering into the conversation. By this point we were feeling so guilty that we would have settled for Celine Dion's *Oasis Songbook*, so we nodded enthusiastically and turned our attention to the menu and the well-annotated, international wine list.

As for the food, all you really need to know is that chef Richard Allen was the sous-chef at the *The Moody Goose*, and that his cooking and presentation are as flawless as this pedigree would suggest. If



Autumnal flavours: the pan-fried guinea fowl



Traditional, calm surroundings

you arrive at lunchtime you can sample his cuisine at the very reasonable price of £12.95 for three courses, from a set menu that conscientiously provides for vegetarians, fish-fanciers and carnivores alike.

Having fussed about the music, we had another unreasonable request up our sleeve: could we choose from meals on the lunch menu even though it was now 8 o'clock in the evening?

The head manager felt that this would not be a problem. By now we were starting to realise that The Cavendish has the most amenable staff in the whole of the city – that hotel training really does make a difference. Other much-appreciated touches included the frequent proffering of

hot, newly-baked bread rolls throughout the meal, and the efficient brushing of crumbs from the table between the courses; an action that in lesser hands can seem more like a reproach than a courtesy.

Each dish placed in front of us was a tiny work of art. Promoted from its lunchtime slot, my goats' cheese tart was an ideal balance of creaminess and tanginess, and came accompanied by a flourish of frisée drenched in what the menu assures me is aged balsamic dressing. There was so much going on on my dining partner's plate that he barely knew where to start, yet each flavour magically held its own, from the rosette of beetroot-cured salmon to the single, perfect, diver-caught scallop on its blini with lime sabayon (£7.95).

The main courses were equally effulgent. My risotto of cèpes was a mound of al dente perfection encircled by an autumnal collection of roasted vegetables, while His choice of pan-fried guinea fowl breast and stuffed confit leg (£14.95) came full of comforting November flavours.

We have felt a little jaded with pudding courses of late, finding them to be much of a muchness wherever we go. The Cavendish eschews such uniformity; it's amazing the difference a little grapefruit can make to a *creme brûlée*, while the addition of iced grape punch and grapefruit sorbet completed a trio to remember (£6.95).

Our verdict? The Cavendish effortlessly achieves standards that the average restaurant doesn't even aim for. We're not sure where we'll be eating next, but wherever it is will have a hard act to follow. ▢

The Cavendish at Duke's Hotel
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