



The Discerning
Diner

Claudia Blake visits The George at Wath

THE GEORGE AT WATH, JUST NORTH OF RIPON, reopened under new management earlier this year. And even before we stepped through the door, we could see that the new owners have put a good deal of thought and effort into refurbishing it.

In fact, the elegant simplicity of the brand new sign on The George's frontage tells you just what to expect from the interior: something stylish, bright and modern, but with a nod to the past. The spacious bar still has the warmth and character of a traditional Yorkshire village hostelry, but muted colours and tasteful furnishings give it a light, contemporary twist.

I gather that The George now boasts a big new function room, and that there are five new bedrooms on the way. Our focus for the evening, though, was firmly on the food. You can eat in the bar, but we decided on the cosy little restaurant area. Our table for two was modestly proportioned but decently equipped, and the smart new chairs with their loose covers were reassuringly comfy.

The menu was printed in brown on beige, perhaps not the easiest text to read in low light. It was concise — a handful of choices in each category — but that's no bad thing. I would rather a restaurant cooked a few dishes well than a large number indifferently. The wine list was wide-ranging, informative and nicely put together, with an eclectic selection of bottles starting at an affordable £13. We picked a bold, spicy New Zealand Pinot Noir at around the £30 mark, and it proved to be an excellent foil for the generous, hearty flavours of our food.

It was robust enough, for example, to stand up to Piers' starter, a wedge of chicken liver and spinach gateau. This delivered the dark, smouldering, savoury tones that you would hope for from chicken livers, but somehow still managed to be light and moreish. It came with an attractive, nicely dressed salad of baby leaves — dinky little beets and cresses — and a tangy tomato coulis. The coulis was tasty and well-made, but arguably surplus to requirements. Its flavour didn't exactly

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clash with those of the gateau, but nor did it especially enhance them. A fine starter nonetheless. It looked terrific and slipped down nicely.

Equally charmingly presented, my set of three tiny butternut

squash and spiced carrot tartlets packed some splendid autumn-through-to-winter flavours inside their light, crispy pastry cases. They came with a dash of beurre blanc and a light, uplifting salad of pea shoots. No doubt about it, chef has a sharp eye and a discerning palate.

There were more big, comforting flavours in my main, a slow-roast shank of lamb. Dark and glistening, it had been basted to an almost honeyed richness. Just what the doctor ordered. The crinkly, crisp Savoy cabbage made a great vehicle for the deeply brooding port jus, and together they provided an ideal counterpoint to the richness of the lamb. Factor into the equation a luscious dollop of fine, creamy mash and the result was a thoroughly rewarding bowlful.



Piers had chosen pan-fried medallions of veal, and the two thick slices came with a fricassée of wild mushrooms in an intoxicatingly creamy shallot and brandy sauce, along with a substantial slab of potato and spinach galette. All incontrovertibly lip-smacking, and bursting with flavour, but just one small quibble: the potato could probably have done with another five minutes in the oven.

Despite having already been very well-fed, we launched a feeble assault on the dessert menu. My apple pancake with Calvados sabayon had plenty of bright, sharp apple tempered with the right amount of spicy sweetness. I feel churlish saying it, but it was actually a bit too much for me after our hearty starters and mains. A thinner crepe and half the amount of apple and I could probably have finished it all.

Piers' Bakewell tart was an unusual take on the classic, with lots of raspberry jam and a thin crunchy topping as opposed to a thin smear of jam beneath an almond cake. It was served with a very pleasant custard, but it was arguably a touch on the cool side. Had it been piping hot we would probably have greeted it with unalloyed ecstasy.

It was back to form, though, with coffees and some gorgeous homemade truffles. Reader, I would happily have paid extra for a bagful to take home.

The arrival of the bill revealed that we had paid a shade over £47 for two sets of three courses, with wine, coffee and minerals adding another £40. Good value? Yes, undoubtedly. There were a couple of minor shortcomings — perhaps not surprising during a busy service — but I do very much like what these folk are doing. Modern,



thoughtful cooking, carefully presented, and several notches above the usual pub dining experience. I should add that we received a warm welcome, and prompt, cheerful and efficient service throughout.

I sense a concern for detail and a commitment to excellence that make me think The George could well become an important landmark on the Yorkshire dining map. Overall, I have only one major regret: not living closer at hand. If Wath were just a mile or two nearer, you would probably find me in The George rather more often than would be good for Piers' wallet.

For further information about The George at Wath call 01765 641324 or visit www.thegeorgeatwath.co.uk.

