

ANDREW KAY DINES OUT



> Yer actual French As Kenneth Williams might say...



The trouble with spending a few days in France is that I come back with a craving for classic French cooking. Not the fancy, oooh la la stuff aspiring to those much coveted stars, which of course I also like. No, the classic bistro food that I grew to love when I was a student in Paris, and back then the food that I could just about afford.

So I was delighted when my old friends H & G invited me to join them for dinner at their New Steine Hotel Bistro. I've been many times before and it became one of my mum and dads' favourite places to eat in the city, as much for the warm welcome as the delicious food.

So with classics in mind I headed to town for what I hoped was going to be a delicious dinner, and I was not to be disappointed. Much as I love modern cuisine, I sometimes crave the comfort of a decent plate of hearty nosh, dishes that have a familiarity. But that familiarity can, as they say, breed contempt. Not here, the young chef delivers the kind of food that puts a smile on your face and a glow in your belly.

H & G asked him to prepare for me a selection of appetisers, a nice idea that gave me a broader picture of his talents. I really enjoyed his fish cakes with good freshly made tartare sauce and an excellent salmon tartare. The foie gras was good but he had been a touch heavy handed with the salt, a mistake easily remedied and one that I doubt he will make again. But it was the crab ravioli in clear fish bouillon that really impressed.

For my main course I chose the pig's cheeks,

cooked to falling apart perfection in a rich red wine sauce and served with mash. I love pig's cheeks, or Bath chaps as I know them, and these were good and also served to show H's dedication to using where possible the very best Sussex produce. H had the fish, and that too looked great, but I watched G devour his duck confit and lentils with greedy envy. It's a favourite of mine and it looked oh so good. Next time...

"Food that puts a smile on your face"

For dessert I could not resist a creme brulée, it's a firm favourite and when done in the classic form, not messed with, it can be perfection. This was just that, perfect, just set custard topped with a wafer thin crust of caramelised sugar, tortoiseshell mottled and as crisp as glass. I like it served in a shallow gratin dish too, as you get so much more of that crisp burnt sugar.

We drank excellent French red wine from a small but well thought out wine list, probably more than is sensible on a school night and I finished with a double espresso that was piping hot, a rare thing I find.

New Steine Hotel Bistro is delightfully traditional, friendly and sensibly priced, you can eat three courses for the same price as a main course in some restaurants. If you choose the special menu and a la carte, it is not much more expensive. Look out also for their art exhibitions and Fringe Festival events this year. Hats off to them and vive la France!

*New Steine Hotel Bistro, 10-11 New Steine, Brighton, BN2 1PB, 01273 681546
www.newsteinehotel.com*

HOTLIST

Indian

Chaula's Brighton

A second venue for this brilliant Indian restaurant is now open here in Brighton. Chaula and her team breathe fresh air into the idea of Indian food with authentic recipes served in bright and stylish surroundings. The cooking has an altogether healthier approach - but not at the cost of flavour.

Thali Deals available 12pm-3pm; Meal Deal for £9.99. Chaula's, 2-3 Little East Street, Brighton, BN1 1HT, 01273 771661, www.chaulas.co.uk

Indian

Chaula's Lewes

Chaula's is renowned for its signature dishes, distinctive décor and friendly staff. All meals are made fresh to order and every curry has its own distinctively flavoured sauce. There is also a wide variety of vegetarian and vegan, as well as gluten and wheat-free dishes.

Buffet available 12pm-3pm Monday to Saturday. Chaula's, Eastgate House, 6 Eastgate Street, Lewes, BN7 2LP, 01273 476707, www.chaulas.co.uk

Cafe

Kiki & Flowers

Kiki's Kitchen offers simple, healthy fresh lunches such as slow cooked Vietnamese beef with rice or grilled haloumi salad, all at really reasonable prices.

Opening hours Monday to Saturday 8am-6pm Sunday 10am-3pm 63 Holland Road, Hove www.kikisflowershop.co.uk

Indian

The Chilli Pickle

The Chilli Pickle is a local favourite with national recognition which combines traditional Indian methods with local produce and an individual style. Their ample Thalys spice up a midday meeting whilst the evening menu offers inventive street food, decadent Tandoori dishes and tasty regional curries, served in a vibrant and bustling setting. Featured in the National Restaurant Awards' UK top 100 in 2011-14.

The Chilli Pickle, 17 Jubilee Square, Brighton, 01273 900383, www.thechillipickle.com

Indian

The Chilli Pickle Canteen

The definitive delivery service from The Chilli Pickle launched this year. Bold, Indian-inspired design, specially commissioned artwork and smart delivery stake out new ground in home dining. Meanwhile, the menu showcases some of the restaurant's familiar touches, with regional curries and homemade pickles and chutneys, plus superb ice creams. *The Chilli Pickle Canteen, order online at thechillipicklecanteen.com, 01273 900384*