



Food & Drink

Andrew Kay finds out what comes from tiny acorns at **Sylvan Oak** in Findon

Heart of oak

Driving rain and rapidly descending fog were not going to put us off. We fired up the Noddy car and pootled off west for dinner in Findon Village on what must have been the drabest evening in January.

What followed, though, was far from drab. Once located, Sylvan Oak turned out to be something of a jewel. In truth, I did not know what to expect. All too often these small restaurants in villages fail to thrill, catering as they do to a small – and to an extent captive – local client base.

Well not here, oh no; this was a fine example of fine food from a chef who is batting way above average. The venue itself is deceptive, the frontage tiny and, when we arrived, quiet. We were seated in the rear room, hidden around a corner from the front and already busy with two large parties. An hour later the place was packed to the gunnels – not Sally – and buzzing.

Sylvan Oak is a family affair with chef Sinan at the helm and sister and dad out front, and there is a relaxed atmosphere – no poncey fine dining attitude or silliness, just a very warm welcome and comfortable atmosphere.

Then out came the menus: what a surprise. This was food with grand ideas, fine ingredients and sophistication to be sure. Could they live up to the promise? We would see...

Mr R made his choices fast and so did I although, to be honest, I would have been happy with anything on the menu bar the roast pineapple. He started with a foie gras and porcini stuffed baked potato with potato butter. It was a rich and hearty dish, packed with robust flavours that kept him busy and happy for some while. I had a taste of the potato butter, a rich, creamy and distinctly potato-flavoured sauce. He loved it too but did suggest that it was not needed, the rest of the dish being good enough without it.

“I can be very childish when it comes to puds and this one was a five star, full marks, tick VG, show-stopping monument to sweet delights”

I chose the lobster, scallop and caviar lasagne in a rich lobster bisque. It carried a supplementary charge but was more than worth it. I loved it, it was refined, it was tasty and satisfying, silky in texture and sexily musky – my kind of food.

Mr R moved on to duck breast with an orange and tea jus. Generous in size, the sliced duck breast was meltingly tender, the skin properly rendered and the jus fascinatingly good. The bed of red cabbage was good too, but perhaps too generous and, by the end, overwhelming. A case of less would have been so much more – but a good dish nonetheless.

I chose lamb rump with honey and thyme roasted root vegetables and a black olive jus. Yummy tender lamb that cut like butter, sweet herby vegetables and the lightest of sauces peppered with black olive shrapnel. It was a triumph, pretty as a picture but rustic and robust too, in contrast to my delicately pretty first course.

Mr R finished with Mango cheesecake and sorbet, wittily de-constructed but packed with fruity punch and contrasting textures. His grin spread from



Lamb rump with honey and thyme roasted root vegetables and a black olive jus

ear to ear. I could not resist a rhubarb glory, a tower of deliciousness that combined biscuit crumbs, ice cream, stewed rhubarb, rhubarb fool, rhubarb jelly – yes, jelly and coconut panacotta; wow I hear you gasp and wow it was. I picked up the sundae spoon and dived in. All I needed, for health and safety reasons, was a snorkel.

I can be very childish when it comes to puds and this one was a five star, full marks, tick VG, show-stopping monument to sweet delights. It took me an age to eat but I was not to be defeated and carried on to the sticky end.

Sylvan Oak certainly delivered and I liked the combination of fine food with a relaxed atmosphere. I also loved the price, with three courses starting at

£21, with a few supplements here and there for some of the more expensive ingredients employed.

It being January we drank only water and one glass of house wine each, how good is that? I would, however, love to return when someone else is at the wheel and have a full run at both the menu and the wine list.

How lucky are the people of Findon, and clearly they know it, as only fools like me and locals would venture out on such a vile night. We left after nearly three hours but the place was still busy and bustling, the staff still smiling and the whole restaurant breathing a distinct air of relaxed success.

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Rhubarb glory



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