

Black Swan, Oldstead

Published Date: 04 June 2010

By Elaine Lemm

There are many routes to a restaurant becoming successful; most involve a lot of hard work, buckets of money and, hopefully, good publicity. Some scream and shout their own praises, try gimmicks on the menu – like the tripe menu recently launched at a well-known eatery – or they have PR companies to sing for them.

But, at the end of the day, none of this is a guarantee and the best success, it seems, comes from that old-nutmeg, word of mouth; deliver the goods and the customer comes back and they bring their friends with them.

The Black Swan, at Oldstead, in North Yorkshire, has been using the "nutmeg" for many years, and how delighted I was to hear that this year Michelin has recognised their talents and awarded them Rising Star status, which, ostensibly, means they are the ones to watch for full Michelin star status next year.



Roast breast and confit leg of duck with creamed celeriac, Bayonne ham, fondant potato savoy cabbage and celery

This is a family-owned snuggly-pub-restaurant in a gorgeous National Park country setting nestled between the White Horse at Kilburn and Byland.

The Banks family have lived and farmed at Oldstead for generations and have quietly worked away running their 16th-century inn for about five years.

I only stumbled across them by accident while out walking in the area a year after they opened. I have been back several times and have watched them evolve from blackboard-pub-grub to now grabbing the attention of Michelin.

Dining at the pub is on two floors, with two styles. In the stone-flagged floor bar area you'll find great British pub classics – think fish and chips, steaks, soups and ploughman's. Upstairs, it's all change. In a more sumptuous décor of Persian rugs, antiques and candlelight, there's a small but absolutely perfectly formed menu of four starters, mains and puddings, a couple of daily specials and a vegetarian menu (yes, menu) to add to the mix.

The Black Swan, as would be hoped, sources as much produce from the region as possible. This policy earned them the Deliciously Yorkshire Restaurant of the Year in 2009.

The wine list casts its net further afield reaching to most parts of the world with price weighted in the high teens to mid-twenties and a few hefties over £50. There is a commendable choice by the glass, which is always a pleasure to see.

It should be easy to choose from four choices but I dithered between a vegetarian starter of a goat's cheese tart, scallops with belly pork, pan-fried mackerel or a classic ham hock terrine. Turbot, duck confit, chicken with sage gnocchi, or shin of Aberdeen Angus beef for mains had me in even more of a tizz.

The mackerel and scallops won the first round and both were excellent choices. The mackerel was squeaky fresh and had lingered just long enough in the frying pan to give the skin a slight crispness but leave the flesh oily and soft. A light-smoked eel remoulade added another fishy dimension.

The plate was dressed with Pickering watercress, and acidity, to balance out the oiliness of the fish, came from a shallot and caper dressing.

The scallops were fat and plump, cooked to the right side of translucence. The surf with the porcine turf is a great marriage of flavours, and with the crispy belly pork, a delightful mix of textures.

I swerved towards vegetarian for my main with sage gnocchi. If your experience of this Italian stalwart is lead balls of sticky potato dough, then I suggest you head straight to Oldstead and try theirs. I had ordered a starter portion for fear of being outfaced but could have easily managed a main size of the light, fluffy confections all dressed up with creamy Paris brown mushrooms, atop wilted baby gem and final flourish of heavily scented white truffle. Heavenly.

Second main was my favourite fish – turbot. This was an excellent fillet cooked with, I can only assume, the same light hand that cooked the mackerel. A beetroot risotto added a daring flash of colour, taste and texture alongside, and a parsley and horseradish butter came galloping up behind to add an overall kick. Again, exemplary cooking.

With so much food, and a couple of glasses of good Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, there was little room for pudding but it would have been a sin not to try something. We shared a Pear Tart Tatin with Pear Purée, Mascarpone and Toasted Almonds, washed down with an Australian Black Noble, De Bortoli. Mistake, we should have ordered two as we greedily fought spoon to spoon to get every morsel off the plate.

Prices at the Black Swan are not cheap – a starter will set you back £7.95 upwards with mains hovering between £18 and £21. But it is unlikely you will need to order anything other than the dish itself. Each is a generous portion with all the sides it needs, and bread is also included. Hurrah to the Black Swan for this pricing policy.

So the quiet, out-of-the-glare approach of the Black Swan has worked. Their success

is in their consistent commitment to quality, across the food, the staff, the location and the four five-star bedrooms. I keep going back for the quality of the ingredients, deft cooking, picture perfect presentation and precise, friendly service. It is no surprise that Michelin is so excited.

The Black Swan, Oldstead, York, North Yorkshire, YO61 4BL 01347 868387. Open every evening. Closed Mon, Tues & Weds lunch. Lunch: Thursday-Saturday noon-2pm, Sunday noon-2.30pm. Dinner every evening 6-9pm.