

Dubh Prais adds the spice of life

McWilliams keep Scottish flag flying

DAVID LAMONT

A FEW years ago, I remember being well impressed when I read an interview with Monsieur Albert Roux, one half of the world-famous French chef team, with brother Michel.

As he prepared to hand over some of the reigns of the business to his son, Michel Albert, after years of building

a hugely successful empire, starting with the multi-Michelin starred Le Gavroche in London in 1967, the culinary legend was asked what he would do in retirement.

"Discover the perfect brown sauce", was his reply.

I don't know if he found it, but if he is still looking and he is ever in Edinburgh I'd advise him to visit Dubh Prais.

This small, intimate, basement establishment on the High Street, just a haggis throw from John Knox House, bills itself as a "Scottish Restaurant."

Since it was opened by chef/proprietor James McWilliams and his wife Heather in 1988, it has earned a well-deserved reputation as

parveyors of finely cooked local fayre.

Before you ask, it's pronounced "doo prash", and its name is something to do with a blackened cooking pot, in Gaelic.

There was nothing blackened about the stunning sauce that accompanied my superbly cooked venison last Friday evening, however. Albert would have loved it.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

First visual impressions are a carpeted stairway into a small, square, cellar room, whitewashed above half timber panel-clad walls, well lit and with only around 20-odd covers.

So not the place for a clandestine, candlelit assignation with your neighbour's wife. The tables are close together and eavesdropping all too easy.

But, in the spirit of the reassuring message from Downing Street as another conspiracy law is considered, if you've nothing to hide, there's nothing to worry about.

Certainly the six gentlemen from the league of nations in the corner were having a fine time, and the two female work colleagues at the next table were more concerned with their waistline than Jihad.

The primary sensation, however, was smell, and the wonderful, reassuring aroma emanating from the small, adjacent kitchen.

Encouragingly in our more globally aware times, the menu proudly proclaims the Scottish provenance of Dubh Prais' suppliers. Fish and



YOU ARE SAUCY: Dubh

Prais has garnered a proud reputation over nearly 20 years at its small High Street location

Dubh Prais review from the Edinburgh Evening News supplement 'The Guide' Friday, November 24th 2006



seafood from northern lochs, beef and game from the Highlands.

Certainly my starter of smoked salmon and capers was a wise choice - light and delicious, with a simple squeeze of lemon and sitting on a small bed of lettuce.

I had been tempted by the Inverawe smoked platter of venison, Argyll ham and duck arranged over a fresh orange salad, but venison was on the horizon for my main course.

It would have been an equally fine choice, as I learned when a plate arrived opposite me to satisfy my dining companion.

"It had an unusual but subtle dressing of Springbank whisky and vinegar, which worked particularly well with the smoked meats," was her

THE BILL

- 1 Inverawe platter £6
- 1 Smoked salmon £7.50
- 1 Venison £16.50
- 1 Chicken £15
- 1 Cheese £5.50
- 1 Bottle Fixin premier cru les Hervelets £38.60
- Total: £89.30**

- Quality of food *****
- Menu Choice *****
- Surroundings ****
- Service *****
- Value ***

verdict. The attentive but not intrusive waiter's message to the kitchen requesting my deer to be cooked pink was well heeded and returned from the pass as ordered. But it was the accompanying jus

that made it perfect. Albert, your search is over.

Up against it on the other side of the table was breast of chicken stuffed with ham and the lightest touch of Mull cheddar. The accompanying sauce with a blend of cider and cream was light and smooth and delicately seasoned.

Both were accompanied by a simple dish of broccoli and carrots and our choice of a bottle of Fixin premier cru from the Cotes de Nuits.

Faced with the almost impossible task of finding anything negative to report, we could only agree that the wine, while fine, was perhaps a little pricy at nearly £40 for a straightforward burgundy, and that the vegetables could have been more interesting.

Even roasted parsnips and asparagus and carrots glazed with honey would have been better, my would-be chef opined, and suggested a roasted explosion of sweet potato, butternut squash with chestnuts and layered with smoked bacon.

But despite our half-hearted efforts at negativity, the cheese had us back in full superlative mode again.

A runny brie, a nutty smoked number and a delicious cheddar were beyond compare - or anything you'd find on the supermarket shelves, for that matter.

You're missing out, Albert.

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