

HIGHCLIFF GRILL NEWS ROOM

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The Highcliff Grill

Liz Kavanagh
ENJOYS DINNER AT THE
BOURNEMOUTH HIGHCLIFF
MARRIOTT HOTEL

Set high on the cliff top, the Bournemouth Highcliff Marriott Hotel has long been well regarded for its fine food and sense of style.

The transformation of the Sea Breezes Restaurant into the Highcliff Grill came at the same time as a £4.5 million refurbishment of the entire property in 2006, and both have given the Highcliff Marriott a modern makeover.

Designed in a cool, contemporary style with art deco influences, low lighting, leather seating and glossy ebony tables, the Highcliff Grill specialises in top-quality fish, seafood and steaks, cooked to perfection with panache.

Fish and seafood are brought in every day from the Dorset coast, while everything from the steak to the vegetables is sourced from within the British Isles. Executive chef Clyde Hellett is passionate about buying British, preferring not to be restricted to county suppliers, which he says can limit menus oppressively.

Both Clyde and his menu are refreshingly unpretentious, with the quality of his ingredients shining through at the menu because they are served simply and without fuss. "I've never been particularly interested in cluttering up a plate with foams or gelsées - which are used all too often for their aesthetic qualities alone," he says. "What matters to me is achieving maximum flavour from everything we serve."



With chefs spending less time on excessive presentation and more on cooking, Clyde has "right-hand man" - as he describes executive sous-chef Andy Smith - and his team can also ensure that their skills are used to the full across the entire menu. Everything from the bread to the ice cream is hand-made each day in the hotel. "It's important to me that every element of the food we serve meets the same standard," Clyde says. "There's something dishonest about serving food that has been cooked outside your kitchen."

The quality of the food has certainly not gone unnoticed: the Highcliff Grill won its first AA rosette only eight weeks after opening. A second rosette was awarded in 2009 and last year its reputation was reaffirmed when it was named 2010 Bournemouth Tourism Restaurant of the Year.

The food and service, it has to be said, are excellent. Looking out over the sea, the restaurant comes alive after dark, when mellow music and constant chatter from fellow diners give it a laid-back yet sophisticated feel. You won't find white table cloths on the tables but you will receive smooth, attentive service and the staff know the menu inside out, making their explanations of the daily specials all the more alluring.

Groups of diners are well catered for here too: the private Signature Room, which seats up to 16, is available at no extra cost for those marking a special occasion. It comes with its own dedicated waiter, and its sliding doors connect it to the rest of the restaurant as the evening progresses.

The menu at the Highcliff Grill isn't vast, which in itself shows confidence in the cooking. But there's plenty of choice nonetheless, with menu changes every four months according to seasonal availability.

My dining companion Sophia began with local scallops, pan-fried to perfection and served with a butternut squash purée and an

inventive star anise caramel sauce, while I went for the punchy fish soup, which came French-style with croûtes, rouille and Gruyère.

The wine list at the Highcliff Grill offers a good selection of world wines, classified to match the food, with many available by the glass. The house white, priced at £5.75 for a large glass and was served in an elegant carafe.

For the main course Sophia tucked into monkfish wrapped in Parma ham, which came with a delicate leek ballotine and a mussel and sorrel fish cream. It was well presented and full of flavour. My special - the grilled salmon served with potato mash and watercress purée - was equally good, the salmon grilled just the way I like it: the skin crisp and the fish beautifully moist.

Dessert for us both was lemon posset. The creamy tartness of the posset was the perfect finish after the fish we had enjoyed.

Next time I will have steak, which comes from premium grass-fed cattle bred in Cornwall, with the meat aged for a minimum of 21 days. The quality of the meat was obviously noted by our fellow diners, with compliments flowing freely around the restaurant.

The Highcliff Grill doesn't have its own entrance as yet, but you can't help feeling it won't be long before this happens. With 50 per cent of its clientele currently coming from outside the hotel, it is certainly already making a name for itself. ■

The Highcliff Grill, St Michael's Road, Bournemouth.
01202 200800. www.highcliffgrill.co.uk

Sunday lunch Highcliff style

On Sunday the restaurant offers a popular three-course Sunday lunch with live music for £23.80 per person, including an aperitif and coffee. Early booking is recommended.