

March 2011 - Highcliff Grill Review in Compass Magazine

# Highcliff Grill Bournemouth

Written by Emma Caulton



What has happened to the institution of The Sunday Lunch? Once the foundation stone of family dining, fractured families and Sunday opening hours have transformed it into an occasional treat. While reminiscing, Colin and I decided it was too long since either of us had sat down to a proper Sunday Lunch and took ourselves off to the Highcliff Grill at the Marriott Hotel, perched on Bournemouth's West Cliff.

It felt extra special, more than just Sunday Lunch. We were brought aperitifs of buck's fizz with grenadine and seated in a bay window with views across wind-tossed waves, and a saxophonist played Moondance. Colin started with a tower of creamy crab flavoured with dill, pickled beetroot (pronounced as good as his own homegrown beetroot which is high praise) and a crunchy slice of ciabatta. I had deep pink confit of just-crisped salmon on leeks teased into a ballotine with a saffron dressing so fragrant I could inhale the dish.

Our wine was presented to us in individual carafes which I found a

delightful detail. It was a catarratto from Sicily: a lovely soft aromatic white with a honeyed finish.

I had fillet of bream, fresh-flavoured with a very good toasty skin, on an irresistibly piquant sweet, sour and sharp tomato butter sauce and crisp samphire. Colin picked a big plateful of roast loin of organic pork with apple sauce and roast gravy from the carvery. He was given three big thick flavoursome slices of meat and lots of "wonderful" tasty crackling which he thoroughly enjoyed crunching. It was served with an imaginative accompaniment of seasonal vegetables: braised red cabbage, herby roasted root veg and cheese-topped onion halves. (On a neighbouring table the roast sirloin of beef included a Yorkshire pudding the size of a small spaceship.)

Colin is one of those irritating people who decide they can't possibly have room for dessert and then nick a fair amount of your own. (The waiter tried to tempt him with baked mango cheesecake or iced white chocolate chiboust, but he was having none of it.) Luckily it was a generous ramekin of creme brulee with a burned sugar crust

that snapped (hurray) and soft chunks of apple and raisins (turning this classic into old-fashioned apple and custard), and served with an intense blackberry sorbet on a crumbly short shortbread.

When I told Colin the price of our set meal he was astounded. "They deserve to have people queueing at the door for that price and quality." Well, yes, I couldn't begin to prepare such an excellent menu for the price, and this is fine dining, too. And then I'd have to wash-up myself. This is Sunday Lunch the way it should be.

## ESSENTIALS

**Where:** Highcliff Grill, Marriott Hotel, Bournemouth BH2 5DU, 01202 200800

**What:** Colourful two AA rosette award-winning hotel restaurant with wonderful views

**Service:** Very attentive; everyone was gently fussed over

**What's the damage?** Outstanding value for quality, three-course Sunday lunch including aperitif, coffee or tea, £21.50