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restaurant review:
The Highcliff Grill

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Malcolm and Laura Scott-Walby

On an evening of driving rain and dull November cold, I decided to treat us to a touch of glamour and luxury. The Highcliff Grill, newly awarded with an AA Rosette, at the four star Marriott hotel in Bournemouth was the perfect cure for the late Autumn blues. We could just see lights from the Needles lighthouse and the ferry, as it passed, on a gloomy, wet evening, but the cure was effective.

I am very glad to declare that the last couple of years have seen the end of second rate British hotels and hotels like the Highcliff Marriott have been part of the driving force towards promoting high international standards. The plush entrance lobby of the hotel and the courteous staff are more five star than four and the incredibly polite and friendly waitress made sure that we were relaxed and had drinks brought to us within minutes.

Guests were dressed well but not formally. A large group of rather glamorous people from the Netherlands, as well as smart British guests, made sure that the bar area and the restaurant were pleasantly full but not overcrowded. How pleasant to be able to move between tables freely, without having to squeeze between other diners.

I will confess to no particular level of knowledge about wine and happily left the choice of a delicious Gavi fruity Italian white wine, to Laura my wife. This was an excellent choice as we were able to drink with all three courses enjoyably.

The menu has a strong local flavour, which I thoroughly commend. Our starters of creamy fish soup and Laura's choice of tian of goats cheese were both delicious, accompanied by warm fresh bread.

For main course we chose Dorset lamb and turbot on a bed of celeriac and fresh mushrooms. The turbot was firm but superbly cooked and the flavour of wild fresh mushrooms demonstrates the care taken in cooking with excellent ingredients. My lamb was rare as requested and absolutely delicious. It was simple course with creamy fresh spinach but everything about it was delicious. When you eat food as good as this, you simply feel better knowing that it is fresh and excellent quality.

As a sucker for puds, so I could hardly say no on this occasion and for the purposes of this report I bravely sacrificed my waistline to summer pudding and crème fraiche – what a combination! The rice pudding with fruit was my wife's choice and I was only afforded the minutest portion strictly for testing purposes.

It was a lovely meal, surprisingly reasonable in price and you came out feeling as if you had experienced a touch of glamour. The chorus of friendly 'Goodnights' from the waitresses rounded off a great evening.

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