

A LITTLE FRENCH IN ST ALBANS

Where - George Street, St Albans

At the helm: Chef patron Faisal Maniar, takes inspiration from the French side of his Mauritius and French heritage, when creating dishes for this pleasant restaurant. His background, which includes positions as sous chef at The Ritz and The Bluebird Club and most recently as head chef at the The Hillside in Hertford, before taking on The Albany.

The atmosphere

Taking into account that historic St Albans is not short of eateries in listed buildings, The Albany, which opened in 2007, is one that had added modern trappings to a traditional-style pub. Formerly the Olde Kings Arms, the 15th century grade II listed building looks like a modern bistro.

The back dining room has tomato red leather chairs and padded coverings on two statement walls in the same colour, which drags it into the 21st century. It has a striking impact against the white gloss painted walls and white linen table clothes. From the outside looking in, The Albany seems quite unassuming and on certain nights when the restaurant is half full passers by would think it was empty as the staff tend to seat guests in the back room away from the front window. All in all it's comfortable and private and some of the tables have views into its courtyard.



What's on offer

The set lunch and dinner menus are favorites. Dinner at £15.95 for two courses and £19.95 for three and lunch at £14.95 for two courses and coffee is reasonable. The menus for lunch and dinner are quite similar. All the classic dishes are on them; moules marinere and crayfish and avocado cocktail on the starter menus, are followed by belly of Gloucester old spot pork served with white bean and chorizo cassoulet on the mains. The dinner menu has more delectable dishes such as terrine of ham hock, black pudding and foie gras as a starter. For main there's rump steak while there's a sirloin steak on the lunch menu.

What we had

The bread, surprisingly was not cooked on site but was a bought in par cooked baguette, finished off in the oven. Starters of moules marinere came without bread but some saved from earlier went down well with the tasty white wine/garlic sauce, served over the small mussels. Duck dishes are fantastic with a sweet element to it and at the Albany it comes with a creamy vanilla mash and braised carrots, which is a welcome alternative to classic orange, plum or blueberry. The steak had a char grilled outer and melt-in-the-mouth centre. The vanilla crème brulee dessert was accompanied with a separate serving of poached berries, dusted with icing sugar.

How to book

Contact The Albany on
01727 730888
or visit the website at
www.albanyrestaurant.co.uk



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The Albany - a hidden gem

AS a young adult I must have stumbled my way around just about every one of the numerous pubs, bars and nightclubs St. Albans has to offer. Over time, I became very familiar with some of the best and the worst. However, as I grew older, my social life took a more relaxed turn.



Fine food in a calm atmosphere became preferred. Fortunately, St. Albans has its fair share of great restaurants, allowing me to indulge with another equally rewarding, yet substantially less hazardous pastime!

Sadly (but in the best possible way), having become a parent twice over the last five years, keeping 'in' with the restaurant scene has been a challenge, so it was a most welcome surprise when I was invited to join the editor of Focus and sample the menu of the Albany Restaurant, George Street, St. Albans, owned and run by Faisal Maniar.

History

My second surprise came when I realised the Albany was located in place of one of my all time favourite pubs - The Old Kings Arms. Initially, I felt a pang of remorse for the loss of the source of many great memories forged during countless weekend pub crawls. However, after venturing inside I soon discovered that the interior had not been tastelessly replaced with an over the top modern refit. In fact, it still resembled the 'old great' I had

frequented so many times in the past, with the Tudor style wooden back beams still a feature.

With my mind silently reminiscing, we were politely seated, drinks ordered and menus supplied. We began to peruse a deliciously descriptive collection of modern European/French dishes and, following much mouth-watering deliberation, I finally settled on the 'Albany charcuterie board' to start, followed by 'Gressingham duck breast with vanilla mash, sugar snaps and baby carrots' (pictured). My Editor chose 'Risotto of mediterranean vegetables and smoked cheese' followed by 'Roasted free range chicken supreme with garlic, leek and potato gratin'.

Following our order we were treated to a wonderfully appetising amuse-bouche which left us eager for our starters whilst picking keenly on a freshly baked warm roll.

Now, at this point, I would be tempted to describe every detail of each dish, however, as hard as I try, I am still struggling to find a way to adequately articulate such an appreciable dining experience. So, I shall say only this; My final and best surprise of the day came halfway through the main course when I finally realised that this 15th century



grade II listed building, which I had previously regarded only as a great drinking establishment from my past, had gloriously evolved to become an outstanding location for some fantastic food at very reasonable prices.

Indeed, I was so impressed with the homemade Raspberry and Cinnamon ice cream I chose for dessert that I refuse to mention any other on offer!

Yes, I have grown up a lot since my 'going out on the town days' but now I am approaching the 'Big 40' it would seem life really does get better - you just have to know where to go.

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