



# An educated palate?

Francesca Hurley searches for European-style comfort in the company of wine specialist, and former restaurateur, John Hattersley.

**D**espite what we like to think, we are no way near our European cousins when it comes to dining out. Whereas the populace of France, Italy and Spain can sidle up to a cafe, dine alfresco on the finest food and think nothing of it, going out for a proper restaurant meal in the UK is still a major undertaking.

We worry about the price, the quality, whether we are wearing the right thing, choosing the right wine and even conversing about the right topics.

The Walnut Club in Hathersage will allay the British diner's anxiety. The restaurant evokes a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere, giving the impression the diners are as well.

My companion for the evening, wine specialist John Hattersley, noted that there are no pretensions to the place. Gone are the traditional tablecloths and know-it-all waiters, and in their place exists a non-condescending and mature dining experience, that doesn't feel forced or fussed over.

John ran his own restaurant, Aitch's in

Bakewell, and only sold up one year ago to concentrate on wine supplying. These two careers have made him a well-known name and face in the area. But more importantly, this man knows food; how it should be presented, eaten and appreciated. Needless to say, he also knows his wine.

Both myself and John spent much of our youth in Spain, and seemed to have a mutual understanding of the continental ease at dining out and expecting good food to be served to you. John's parents owned a restaurant in Torremolinos in the 1960s, when the Spanish coast still belonged to the Spaniards. From his time spent in Spain and in France, he knows that value for money and delicious fare shouldn't be a pleasant surprise when you are at a restaurant; it should be a given.

"Europeans are taught to eat in restaurants, whereas here we are taught to avoid them because they are expensive and highbrow," John mused. "Having no tablecloths and putting out candles makes the restaurant inviting and the atmosphere doesn't hinder your night out.

"People won't go out to restaurants because there is nothing out there to entice them. They need a restaurant to educate them in what good food is, what good value for money is and how easy it is to go out and just enjoy yourself."

So we were delighted to find that the Walnut Club just might be the place for such an education. Move over Paris and Barcelona; Hathersage is where it's at.

The Walnut Club opened in May and has been rapidly generating approval due to its fresh and organic approach.

Grateful customers across the region have been returning time and time again, some coming from London. Even the transient celebrities of the area have managed to return several times, including Clarissa Dickson-Wright and national hero, Michael Vaughan. In fact Mr Vaughan was in for a plate of steak and chips two days prior to winning the Ashes.

The gastronomic delights John and I sampled were clear indications of the restaurant's objective to take traditional dishes and inject something special into them. And the flavours we could taste could have only come from organic and



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fresh products. The restaurant's head chef, Nicholas Wilson, has trained his kitchen to his same high standards, and sous chef Paul Soczowka was every inch as good.

To get a feel for the food on offer, I opted for a marinated tomato filled with crab meat, pureed asparagus and chunks of crisp apple. I have never contemplated the amalgamation of such foods but it worked divinely. It was light and delicate, offering a palatable mix of textures and flavours.

John's flamboyantly displayed lobster salad had its own heady aroma, which he described as evocative. Perhaps it was the mango and chilli dressing or the ripe and tender age of the lobster, but the sweet perfume wafting from the plate was nothing like I have ever associated with seafood before. A real delight and surprise.

John had sea bass from the Chefs Specials menu, which he said was cooked to perfection, complemented by crisp asparagus and dressed with hollandaise sauce. My chicken breast was served in a delicious curry cream sauce, which was quite mild but very flavoursome.

The meal was complemented by John's selection of wine, which was a French white aged in oak barrels. The acidic and full-bodied

taste enhanced both the fish and the chicken.

Something else we both felt needed to be mentioned, was the staff's superb service. They were attentive and delivered wine and food with flair, but not in an overly done fashion. It made a noticeable effect on the atmosphere and sadly, is not something you see very often.

Looking around, it was clear that regular customers were in and staff greeted them with ease and pleasantness. It is always the little things that make some one feel welcome and makes them return. The Walnut Club's emphasis on the local area is evident in that respect.

Up and coming events at the restaurant include wine tasting nights that will be accompanied by micro taster dishes, a Halloween night for locals and menus for ladies who lunch. Also, a recent addition is a lunchtime and evening set menu.

John and I had a very enjoyable evening of good food and good wine; a relaxed meal in pleasant surroundings. We would heartily recommend the Walnut Club, but especially to those who don't venture further than fish and chips down at their local. I don't want to be harsh, fish and chips is all very good, but this is so much better. ■



**John Hattersley**

## What they ate:

### Starters

Salad of Cornish  
 Lobster dressed in chilli  
 and mango salsa,  
 £11.95

Marinated Tomato filled  
 with freshly picked crab  
 meat dressed with  
 asparagus and crisp  
 apple with sundried  
 tomato essence, £7.50

### Mains

Pan Fried Sea Bass  
 with creamed potatoes  
 and fresh asparagus  
 dressed with  
 hollandaise sauce,  
 £18.95

Breast of Chicken with  
 an apricot and  
 pistachio risotto and a  
 mild curry cream  
 sauce, £15.25

### Desserts

The Walnut Club hot  
 melting chocolate  
 pudding with bourbon  
 vanilla ice cream, £6.50  
 Raspberry crème  
 brulee with almond  
 tuilles, £5.95

### Wine

Macon Blanc Villages  
 'Les Essentielles' (oak  
 barrel) Burgandy,  
 France, £20.45