

## Excerpt from The Scotsman Review—27 July 2013 by Gaby Soutar



**Shinty today at the dell, said the sign at the bottom of the hill. The gears grind as we accelerate up, then down the roller-coaster dip of a driveway, past the sun-charred gardener strimming the grass, into a shady patch in the carpark, sandwiched between a Jag and a Mini.**

Ah, the joys of escaping a sweaty metal sarcophagus after enduring the evil A9.

We're in Kingussie, and this restaurant with rooms – a former water-powered tweed mill, built in the late 1800s – seems like an oasis.

Especially as we're left alone to read the lunch menus (£18 for three courses) on the patio, under a silver birch, while chaffinches tussle in the branches.

It's so sunny, but bulky clouds pass overhead. "The weather is menopausal, like me," says another diner, "It's having hot flushes".

I'd seen a sweetcorn and eel soup on a sample menu, so had got myself into an unseasonably soupy mood.

Unfortunately, it was a different, more ordinary version on our visit – cauliflower and truffle – which I supped in their shady dining room.

It was a fine-tuned liquid though – rich, peppery, and not too hot (just right), with pheromone-y lashings of truffle oil.

Our other starter – chicken liver parfait - also seemed to be created by a nerdy perfectionist. It was silky and musky, with a sprinkle of sea salt on the top, and a dark, sticky-sweet fig and apple jam, as well as two rough oatcakes, on the side. Joy.

Mains were equally proficiently executed, but more exciting. The stone bass was a block of creamy-fleshed fish, which came with sea spinach and slippery spears of wild asparagus (I don't think I've ever seen either of these ingredients on a menu before), as well as six thumb-print-sized nibs of toasted gnocchi, julienned strips of veg and a buttery yellow sauce.

A lot of hard work had gone into a relatively affordable set menu dish. Kudos.

Same goes for the lamb rump, which featured two pieces of pink meat that were topped by a vibrant green pesto-y herb paste.

They sat on top of a megamix of peas, silverskin onions, neat baby carrots, spring onions, stocky gravy and leeks – all neatly trimmed, cut and sliced, in the manner of a samurai master.

Our only criticism was the lack of carb. Some sides on the menu might be an idea?

Mind you, we had been asked earlier if we wanted more of the fantastic, yet gratis sourdough rye bread (with sea-salted, perfectly room temperature butter) that we'd munched pre-starter. If only Dr Who hadn't borrowed our time machine.

Puddings were a soupçon less successful.

My intense strawberry soufflé was a creation of Godlike genius, but its experimental sides – a balsamic vinegar ice-cream that tasted a bit like cream of tartar, and a jug of strawberry jus – didn't seem like the ideal accessories.

We were overly excited about the Arctic roll option, as we are children of the Seventies.

Unfortunately, the vanilla ice-cream, which was swaddled into a rather tough shortcrust whorl, was freezer burnt and too ice-crystally.

The only authentic partner to this option would be Ice Magic (mint flavour), but it would be hard to beat the bionically-fruity raspberry ice-cream that we got instead.

Anyway, what a place this is – a little sliver of Heaven that's well worth missing the shinty for.

### **The verdict**

How much? Lunch for two, excluding drinks = £36    Food 9/10    Ambience 9/10    Total 18/20