

**Paolo Tullio**



### The Tannery

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**T**his week I realised something I should have thought of years ago. It's this: there's something that only doing this job for a long time can give you, and that's the chance to witness evolution. Not in the biological sense, of course, but in the culinary sense.

I'll be specific: this week I went to The Tannery in Dungarvan, which I've reviewed before, so I got to see how it's evolved. I've just checked my last review and found it was in 2001, nine years ago. Where do the years go? Anyway, I was there again this week with Gill Hall, whose family house is close by in Villierstown, and it was Gill who was with me on the last visit.

A couple of things struck me as I read through my last review. First, I was surprised to see that we ended up drinking exactly the same wine as last time, and, second, the price surprised me. Last time dinner cost £73.80, which isn't far off €100, and this time it wasn't much more. Considering how much inflation has raged in the past nine years, it's evident that restaurant prices haven't kept pace with it.

But before I go into details, I want to say this. Looking through my last review it was clear that I thought Paul Flynn to be a talented chef and I liked the restaurant. But that's the pleasure of being able to watch evolution — whereas last time the food was good, this time it really had the wow factor.

And it wasn't just the food that had evolved; so had the restaurant and the Flynn's empire. The restaurant has been re-modelled — there are now two town houses across the road with 14 bedrooms between

### THE VERDICT

**FOOD 9/10**  
**AMBIENCE 9/10**  
**VALUE FOR MONEY 9/10**  
**TOTAL 27/30**

25-30 = EXCELLENT  
20-25 = GOOD  
15-20 = FAIR  
0-15 = POOR



High hopes: An airy, comfortable dining room matched with good food and service made for a memorable dining experience at The Tannery

## Coming back for seconds

them, and there's a brand-new, state-of-the-art cookery school just around the corner. But the really exciting bit is right next door to the cookery school — a three-quarter acre vegetable garden.

Until recently it was a patch of wasteland, untended and unkempt; now it comprises gravelled paths running between raised beds with a large polytunnel in the middle. Every vegetable you can think of, plus some you've never heard of, are growing here. What excites me about this is that we no longer talk about food miles but food yards, as the produce moves only across the road to the diners' plates.

The dining room is high-ceilinged, airy and bright, and the tables are well-spaced, giving you a sense of privacy. There were two menus to choose from: a set dinner which offered three courses for €28.50, and an à la carte. I sug-

gested that Gill choose from the à la carte and I pick my meal from the set dinner. There were plenty of choices: starters offered a cream of white onion soup, a foie gras royale with apple jelly, or a tasting plate with a mix of starters; mains offered glazed pork belly, pan-fried lemon sole, a whole poussin or a risotto made with wild garlic.

The à la carte had some interesting dishes: starters included a crab crème brûlée and a Moroccan spiced quail; main courses included roast rump of lamb and calamari with black pudding. Gill doesn't eat meat, so she chose the raviolo stuffed with sweet potato and Knockalara cheese to start and then one of day's specials, brill.

Since we were right on the sea, fish seemed like an obvious choice for me too, so I ordered the mixed starter plate then the lemon sole.

The wine list isn't long, but there

are good wines listed and prices carry a modest mark-up. I confined myself to the white part of the list and ordered the Rias Baixas from Martin Codex, one of my favourite Albariños, a wine from Galicia in Spain. I really must try to be less predictable. A couple of bottles of mineral water completed the order.

Friendly and very skilful service added hugely to the enjoyment of this meal. It's a cliché, but good service can mask a multitude of sins, just as bad service can ruin the best offerings of a kitchen. But when, like here, good food is combined with good service, you get the best of restaurant experiences.

From the moment the starters arrived, we knew we were in good hands. Gill's raviolo was superb and had her almost rapturous, while my mixed plate really showed off what The Tannery can do. A pork rilette, a sliver of ox tongue on a hummus cracker, a crostino of crab with pickled cucumber and a demi-tasse of the white onion soup were each perfectly executed.

The main courses were just as impressive. A perfectly cooked and perfectly enormous brill arrived in front of Gill, who made a brave attempt at finishing it but couldn't quite, while my lemon sole fillets

were cooked just as I like them — still firm and tasting as though they'd been swimming in the sea a few hours earlier. They were stuffed with a mussel mousse and came with asparagus and a saffron Hollandaise. Utterly delicious, as was an accompanying side dish of leeks and broad beans.

We finished up with a good old-fashioned lemon posset between us, and an espresso and a tea brought our meal to an end. Comfortable surroundings, good food and good service made this a meal to remember. Our bill came to €116.50.

The next day I took Gill and her father to The Cliff House in Ardmore, which has the only Michelin star outside of the capital. The chef is Dutchman Martin Kajuter, who was chef in De Kas, an extraordinary restaurant in Amsterdam. It's housed in what used to be the three glass houses of the botanic gardens, one of which has been turned into a restaurant, the other two produce its vegetables.

Martin has two gardens for his kitchen in Cliff House. A simple but excellent bar lunch convinced me that it's time I returned to Waterford to review dinner here. Watch this space. **W**

#### ON A BUDGET

The set menu that I ate from runs from Tuesday to Friday and offers great value at €28.50.

There are three starters, four main courses and four desserts to choose from and they include some excellent dishes.

#### ON A BLOWOUT

Considering the sheer quality of the food, the prices on the à la carte are very reasonable. The most expensive starter, the spiced quail, is €12.50 and the most expensive main course, an aged rib-eye steak, is €28.50.