



The Poacher chef Lucakz

Gastro-delightful

Good home cooking in a friendly, modern environment is the order of the day at The Poacher, just outside Tonbridge

Words by Sarah Sturt

If you are looking for hearty, honest home cooking in a friendly, modern environment, then The Poacher in Tudeley, just outside Tonbridge, is the ideal venue. It manages to be both a bar and restaurant with consummate ease and, judging from my two recent visits – one at lunchtime, the other for dinner – this trendy gastropub is attracting a steady and loyal following both during the week and at weekends.

Bought by family-run group, Cross Oak Inns, in 2005 and launched in style last March after a £350,000 transformation, the contemporary design by Originata includes chunky oak tables and chairs (some stripey, some oak, others banquettes) and contemporary touches such as a zinc-covered bar.

Add in mirrored pillars, pretty chandeliers, a stone-flagged floor and Roman blinds at the windows and you have a really upmarket, country kitchen-style venue for chef Lukasz Wozniak's creations.

His wide-ranging menu has a broad appeal, with pasta, salads, steaks and burgers among more ambitious offerings such as our starters of piping hot, Thai-spiced fishcakes served with a piquant chilli sauce for me, and my dining chum's choice of caramelised red onion tart with grilled feta cheese and sharply dressed

rocket leaves, which showed a great contrast of flavours.

On something of an onion trail, he plumped for a whole roast marinated baby chicken ("fun sized", apparently) served with red onions and thyme bread sauce to follow, while I tucked into a perfect winter dish – honey and mustard slow-roasted lamb shank with gratin potatoes, which was tasty and tender.

A word of advice here – we didn't realise and weren't advised that vegetables need to be ordered separately, so our 'seasonal selection' and wilted spinach followed on a bit after our mains arrived, as we both felt the dishes needed them. So make sure you get your order in on time.

Well-judged and presented puddings included my highly alcoholic roast pears marinated in red wine with the yummy addition of hot chocolate sauce and caramelised almonds, while my companion's "creamy and zesty" lime cheesecake with a gingernut base and passionfruit sauce clearly got his vote – not a crumb was left.

The wine list has plenty of interest, including a good selection by the glass, and service from a black-clad, mainly young female waiting staff is attentive and efficient under Oliver Goulton's watchful eye.



The Poacher, Hartlake Road, Tudeley

Tonbridge TN11 0PH

Tel: 01732 358934

Open: Mon to Sat, lunch 12 to 2.30pm (bar closes 30 minutes after food service ends), evenings 6pm to 9.30pm, Sun and Bank Holidays, 12pm to 5.30pm. Typical prices: home-made pie and roast potatoes £8.95; mushroom and Stilton risotto £8.50; Caesar salad £6.75; whole roast baby chicken £13.45; treacle tart £4.50.

■ Christmas menu

Traditional and vegetarian offerings, four courses, £27 per person.

■ Further information

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