

Above

DEL VERDE RESTAURANT
PARK LANE, ROUNDHAY

OLIVER had never even heard of Del Verde before a sign popped up on a road driven along several times a week.

Intrigued by the idea of a hitherto unknown restaurant in a familiar area of the city, the decision was made to check it out. But after driving into the car park and surveying the eatery's exterior, that plan was nearly cancelled.

Thankfully, the temptation to drive off and find somewhere else was quelled, and the result was an excellent meal.

To get the negatives out of the way, the outside area needs some work.

The front of the building looks a bit shabby, and more like it should be the rear.

And the narrow corridor through which the customers walk looks more like a service route than a diners' first introduction to an upmarket establishment.

A lone table and pair of chairs look slightly abandoned outside, presumably only ever used by staff on a smoke break.

And, for me, the green Del Verde logo is also misleading.

It doesn't shout top-class service, wonderful food, great value – which is the truth about what's on offer inside.

To me that sign simply says "cheap pizzeria".

However, on stepping inside we were promptly seated by a cheerful waitress and treated to the lush green view of Roundhay Golf Course, through huge windows.

We promptly tore into the packets of grissini, enhanced by a flavour-packed serving of garlic mayo dip and quickly made our selections from a mouthwatering menu.

The choice of starters included prawns and chorizo in a red wine; queen scallops, and black pudding with balsamic wilted spinach, bacon lardons & poached egg.

My partner picked the whitebait, flash fried with a lemon mayonnaise dip (£6.25).

He said it was served exactly as whitebait should be, a hearty portion of crisp fish, no bones, but still pleasantly fishy.

And it won bonus points for the salad, which instead of being a useless, tasteless garnish of iceberg lettuce and slices of tomato and onion, actually complemented the rest of the dish and was served with a well-made dressing.

Oliver opted for the mushrooms in garlic and cream sauce with chargrilled bruschetta (£5.25) to start.

It was creamy without being too rich and was packed with firm, juicy mushrooms.

The smoky smell of the bruschetta was delicious and the chargrilled flavour was the ideal counterpart to the smooth sauce.

Our waitress scored immediate brownie points when she handed us the correct dishes, without asking who had ordered what.

It might not sound a big deal but we struggled to remember the last meal out where staff had taken the trouble to memorise our requests.

Another touch which elevated Del Verde above many eateries was seeing the chef

diners and asking how their meals were.

For the main course my partner chose the lamb rump with confit of garlic, red wine and rosemary jus (£14.95).

It arrived looking just the right shade of pink and was succulent and tender, served with greens and potatoes, cooked to perfection. It was a great, balanced dish and it made a refreshing change not to have to order the side dish of greens for an extra £3.50, as is the trend in most eateries these days.

Other main courses included grilled halibut served with browned caperberry butter, king prawns and lemon; and chicken escalope with Palma ham, mozzarella and a sage jus.

And there was also a decent amount of vegetarian choices, including filo feta pillows with red pepper dressing and garlic roast potatoes (£11.95); and parmesan battered aubergine with pesto dressing and sun blushed tomatoes (£11.95).

I plumped for the ravioli filled with porcini mushrooms and sage, with parmesan butter sauce with essence of white truffle oil (£8.95).

The distinctive truffle scent wafted up from the plate as soon as it hit the table, whetting my appetite for the taste sensation that was to follow.

The delicate little yellow parcels were cooked to dreamy perfection, lightly moistened by the sauce, while the musky filling melted in the mouth with a burst of flavour.

It was sensational and without doubt the best Italian dish I've eaten, outside of Italy. This made sense when I subsequently found out owner Kevin Maudson had worked at renowned Italian eatery Salvo's for 20 years, before leaving last year to set up Del Verde. Despite being extremely full, we couldn't resist the desserts, which ranged from hot chocolate fudge cake to lemon sorbet and hazelnut and chocolate frangipane, all £4.65 each.

My partner chose the vanilla panacotta with summer berries and a shortbread biscuit.

The creamy dessert itself was slightly on the sloppy side but not to the detriment of the flavour and my partner said it could be easily excused after the wow factor of the previous courses and the top-notch service.

It was especially complemented by the sharp summer berries and there were enough to accompany every mouthful, rather than just a trendy drizzle on the plate.

The tiramisu – "the traditional Italian pick-me-up" – was divine, a heavenly combination of fluffy, light cream, chocolate, sponge drenched in strong, aromatic coffee, with a warming taste of alcohol.

Our two waitresses were eager to help, unobtrusive and knowledgeable about the dishes and the business.

With a bottle of sparkling water, plus a bottle of our favourite Sauvignon Blanc Dashwood (£18.95), the bill came to £65.85 – far cheaper than we had expected.

So not only had we enjoyed a fantastic meal, it had also proved great value for money. Del Verde is a true lesson in not judging a book by its cover.

But I hope, for its sake, the owner does make a few little tweaks to its appearance because it deserves to be a success – and the people of Leeds deserve to experience its charm.

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FACTFILE

- Tel: 0113 266 3307
- Web: www.delverde.co.uk
- Opening times: Tuesday-Saturday, 6pm to 10.30pm; Sunday, 12 to 3pm

STAR RATING

FOOD.....****
 VALUE.....*****
 ATMOSPHERE.....*****
 SERVICE.....*****

***** EXCELLENT **** VERY GOOD

*** GOOD ** AVERAGE * POOR

DEL VERDE

Oliver's Review

Yorkshire Evening Post - Thursday 13 Aug 2009