

Andrew Kay falls in love with In Vino Veritas



In 1974 I hit London, and in particular Chelsea, just in time to enjoy the wine bar boom. It seemed that the metropolis had gone vino mad and we as art students were certainly inmates of those tiny asylums that were so aptly dubbed wine bars.

Initially the wine bar phenomenon was great, we would settle down to endless bottles of house plonk, much of it of very dubious provenance, and sip away looking as 'Parisien' as possible. I even took to wearing a gigantic red beret.

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Then all at once the joy went out of wine bars. Where once we would ponder over a Pinot we were suddenly being asked if we were eating? The simple wine bar had morphed overnight into a restaurant. It was a phenomenon that re-occurred when pubs did the same. For a while it was nigh on impossible to get a drink without having to order a meal.

I missed wine bars. They had taken me from a passing knowledge of Hironnelle and Blue Nun to a new level of drinking. I became aware of varieties and regions and developed a long lasting habit.

Now Brighton and Hove boasts a new era of wine bars. In Vino Veritas is on one level just that, a bar that specialises in wine. It's also rather a sophisticated cocktail bar, tapas style eatery and bistro. Tucked just east of the back of the Jubilee Library, it occupies a rather smartly refurbished building on four floors. The basement is a cocktail bar, the ground floor the wine bar and informal restaurant, the first a bistro and the top is given over to the kitchen.



And what a kitchen, I went along with my old mate and fellow publisher James Ledward. Now to say that Jimmy G-Scene has a good appetite is understatement on the grand scale. His capacity for bon vivacity is legendary – as is my own.

We started with a Martini and a glass of champagne. We were on the ground floor and the atmosphere was fun and relaxed. It seemed right to stay there and give the tapas selection a bit of a thrashing rather than moving upstairs for a more conventional starter. We left the choice to the patron and before long we were both swooning over a rich duck egg and smoked salmon benedict with perfect hollandaise, a heap of prawns wrapped in prosciutto, memorable tender squid rings and some heavenly foie gras, with toasted brioche, and a perfect pear chutney. I even allowed myself to be tempted by a glass of delicious sweet wine to wash the luxurious paté down.

Being in part a wine bar meant that we were able to drink glasses of good wine to suite each course, so much better than trying to choose just one 'cover all' bottle.

We should have moved up to the bistro for the main course but we liked it in the window downstairs. I decided to move on to a duck breast with pommes salardaise and a cep jus. A hearty dish that was right up his alley. I chose a rack of lamb which came with piperade and a thyme jus. The meat was perfectly cooked, pink and succulent and the cutlets trimmed but not too much, so that there was still an fine layer of crisp fat. There was a level of cooking going on here that we seldom see in mid-priced restaurants, an attention to detail and finish that might be more usually found in fine dining establishments, but here we were at a relaxed wine bar enjoying such delights.

We decided to share a pudding and then have a selection of cheese. A poached pear was perfect, sweet and properly infused with red wine and the right amount of spice. The darjeeling and prune sorbet was amazing, rich and slippery, a taste and texture experience to remember.

The cheese was equally memorable and in prime condition. It was also served in decent quantities, unlike so many modern cheese platters, which look like smudges of dairy produce.



In Vino Veritas had us both captivated, we ate well drank to excess and had the jolliest of times. I plan to go back very soon and try their lunchtime special, main course, glass of wine and a coffee in a guaranteed 30 minute time slot.

The guys behind In Vino Veritas have an exemplary track record in the food and wine business and it shows in spades. 'In wine, truth' may be their name, it is through expertise and serious study of

the gastronomic arts they show what truly great and not necessarily expensive restaurants can achieve. And they open late too, with a small list of food that even the bar staff are trained to serve. It's clever yes, but it's also common sense, giving the customers what they want, at prices that will make them return and return.