

EATSLEEPDRINK

MAGAZINE

Issue Seventeen

All you need to know about fine dining, luxury accommodation
and the best food and beverages the UK has to offer

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Stars in the Capital

Alain Ducasse, Marcus Wareing & Tom Aikens



FEATURING:

The Ampersand • The Kensington Hotel • The Lanesborough

Marcus Wareing at The Berkeley • Tom Aikens • Alain Ducasse at The Dorchester

Balblair Whisky • Buffalo Trace • Mamont Vodka

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Three Stars

Unto Itself



As one of only four restaurants to have three Michelin stars in the UK, Alain Ducasse at The Dorchester, headed up by Executive Chef Jocelyn Herland and his award-winning team, has long-been one of the world's most talked about restaurants. On our recent visit, we were thrilled to see it live up to our high expectations.

On being seated at a table for two that viewed the main restaurant area we were offered a fine glass of the house champagne (Selection Alain Ducasse £15.00) by the Head Sommelier Vincent Pastorello whilst we browsed the menus. The space is very traditional in some ways but modern in others. Unsurprisingly for a restaurant of this calibre, the linen and table pieces were pristine and silverware typically 'French'.

Each month, one item from the menu is changed to keep it fresh and it offers a broad selection, with seafood being the undoubted star of the show. Whilst considering the menu, Canapés – as served to the Princesses in Monaco – were sampled along with some Parmesan Choux pastry appetisers (and another glass of champagne). Whilst the space is incontestably refined it lacks the air of pretension one has come to expect in restaurants of similar stature, so we were able to navigate the tempting menus without feeling pressured or intimidated by the rather formidable choices.

A taste of sea and land

After much deliberation, we went for



the Tasting Menu (£180 per person excluding wine) but substituting crab for a fantastic Scottish Langoustine with Truffled Parmentier to start. The langoustine was superb and was accompanied by another glass of the excellent Selection Alain Ducasse champagne.

The second course was one of the restaurant's signature dishes, a Vegetable

Cookpot of British Terroir Vegetables. A revelation in its delivery of taste and texture, it is, quite simply, served in a pot with a lid sealed with puff pastry. The dish worked to the 'five ingredients' motto of the French kitchen of Alain Ducasse and was made particularly indulgent by dipping the pastry in to the dish. We were also impressed by the wine pairing, which

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was a L Tribut 2010 Chablis, which was very crisp and dry; the perfect foil to cut through the earthy flavours of the dish.

Next was a 'Saute Gourmand' of Lobster served with Truffled Chicken Quenelles and Japanese Mushrooms (another signature dish), expertly paired with a 2010 Grüner Veltliner Lamm from Austria. Much deserving of its own sentence, the lobster performed a masterclass in the suspension of expectations. Not only did the dish amaze in terms of taste, the excellent wine surprised us by its inclusion in the Tasting Menu. Indeed, the wine selections from off the beaten track are all made based on flavour and quality to ensure all the choices successfully accompany the food.

Star gazing

The fourth course was a Seared Sea Scallop with Apple and Quince and

Mulled Wine Reduction, which again looked great, tasted better and, although heavier than a normal scallop dish, fitted well at the heart of the Tasting Menu. This was joined by a glass of fresh and elegant 2007 Burgundy from Moray Saint Denis, Domain Dujac which was cleverly balanced with the strong mulled wine.

The main course of the menu was a Limousin Farm House Veal Loin with 'Blanquette Vegetables, and Tuber Melanosporum (grated black truffle; in this case, a very generous amount), which infused the dish with huge flavour. The wine was a Rhone from Saint-Joseph, Domaine du Montillet, a very easy drinking red and a great choice with the veal.

Following this, there was a much-needed pause before a sixth course of cheese was brought. Four different cheeses with individually matched

chutneys, served with hazelnut and fig bread (to die for!) and traditional crackers. Bell Pepper, Apple and Calvados, Mushroom and Hazelnut and a Pear chutney complimented the cheese selections and was served with a 2010 Arbois Fleur de Savagnin produced by Domaine de la Tournelle, that all combined to make for a stunning repose before desserts-proper began.

Whilst considering how we would manage anything further, a selection of chocolates, macaroons and toffees were brought, all beautifully made and direct from the Paris chocolate shop of Alain Ducasse; a lovely surprise.

Served to your choice

An Exotic Fruit Contemporary Vicheron arrived as the seventh course and the sharp sorbet with sweet tropical fruits was very refreshing. The wine was a 2008 >>>



>> Jurascon (from next to the Sauterne region), which managed to be sweet and fresh, a cuvee Marie Kattalin produced by Domaine de Souch.

At this point, our hosts decided that we should try the signature Rum Baba dish to round off our visit. With great difficulty, we had a selection to make from five rums hailing from around the world. Presented on a tray, it is worth a visit alone to see it being served let alone tasting it. You will not be surprised to hear that it was a truly great desert (we had it with lightly vanilla whipped cream, which we'd highly recommend).

After we'd managed to polish off the delightful Baba, we were treated to a kitchen visit. Everything about the 'engine room' was magnificent with its great layout, fantastic attention to detail and organisation, not to mention the cleanest ovens, surfaces and floors we've ever seen. A screen giving live feeds from the four prep areas downstairs (meat, fish, bakery and cellar) ensures that Jocelyn can see every detail required in managing his kitchen.

Indeed, the bakery in the basement can be seen via screens in the kitchens

and produces the bread to order every day to an exceptional standard. All of the breads sampled were so Moorish it is a wonder we got past the third course let alone reached the end.

The wine is brought from a fantastic hidden side cellar to the restaurant where two bottles of every wine on the list are kept at exactly the right temperature. It stores about 2,000 bottles and is re-stocked when necessary from the main cellar several floors above. As you can imagine, it is quite the spectacle to see your wines emerge from such a treasure chest of delight.

Friendly, informal, fantastic

It is perhaps prosaic to summarise food that is consistently wonderful and which has been talked about so often with the praise it deserves, so it seems only fitting to save the last words for the more ambiguous quality of any restaurant, its spirit, which at Alain Ducasse is friendly, informal and informative.

The staff know what they are talking about, can confidently make recommendations and are taught proper

pronunciations of the names of dishes at weekly sessions on a Saturday. Alongside this deeply imbued knowledge there is also a sense of humour amongst the waiters, which is a welcome addition to any restaurant but particularly in those where one would expect stuffiness. The whole environment oozes sophistication and the three star rating is absolutely appropriate.

Of course, such perfection doesn't come cheap – the seven course Seasonal Tasting Menu comes in at £180 per person without wine – but when you're guaranteed this much pleasure the cost is incidental.

Seasonal Tasting Menu for two - £360 without wine (expect to pay northwards of £450 including wine pairings).

Visit: www.alainducasse-dorchester.com for reservations or call: 020 7629 8866

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