

EATING OUT

Toast, Blackpool

When it comes to restaurant names you generally know where you stand. India Cottage or China Red more or less tell you what to expect. La Piazza and The Med aren't going to surprise you too much and there's more than a clue before you even look at the menu for South Shore's Seafood Restaurant.

So where does that put Toast? Clearly you'd be forgiven for thinking breakfasts, a spot of elevenses, maybe even a light afternoon snack. But what about tapas, burgers, grills, pastas and steaks?

Clearly you can get toast at Toast but you can get treated too because the former bank building is out to be all things to all people – and not in the bland way those kebab corner shops claim to be able to cook anything when they can't even master the art of an edible donner.

So if you fancy a snack Toast is fine but if you fancy something more substantial, well, Toast is there for you too.

Owner Riccy Caunce is passionate about Blackpool – and his town centre site. He is at the forefront of campaigners trying to re-establish the town centre as a safe place for locals to enjoy a night out and sees his "cafe - bar - grill" combination as an example of what can be achieved against preconceptions and prejudice.

We opted for a midweek evening and the place was ticking along nicely. The ground floor was reasonably well occupied with lighter biters and even people just popping in for a drink away from the traditional town centre pubs. Upstairs was quieter but still busy enough for us not to have speak in whispers.

The service was immediately impressive. A friendly greeting, well informed waiting staff and the kind of attention to detail too many places abandon after a few weeks.

The only stumbling block was in actually choosing which dining direction to take. Having recently completed another Spanish language course and with a holiday there (for her) looming later in the year, my wife was delighted to discover almost a dozen tapas selections available. After working more hours than I'm paid for I lit up at thought of an 8oz Lakeland fillet with all the trimmings. So we ended up with tapas – which I was reminded we hadn't had since visiting Barcelona last year. How could I resist?

First though we shunned the Sharing Platter (£9.95) because it sounded like it would feed a family. Instead I selected the mussels (£5.95) and my carbo queen settled for potato skins with cheese and chive (£4.75). And to share we decided on a side dish of marinated olives in garlic and fresh herbs which came with toasted ciabatta and those annoying little pre packed butter pats. The white wine, cream, garlic and parsley sauce with the mussels was very good though many of the molluscs had parted company with their shells before arriving at the table.

The skins got the thumbs up on all fronts – and certainly weren't for sharing. Half a dozen tapas seemed a suitable gamble and having lost out on the steak main course I managed to compromise with the Solomillo Y Jerez – strips of pan seared sirloin steak served in a sherry reduction



FACTFILE

Address: 28 Clifton Street, Blackpool.

Telephone: (01253) 749777.

Website: toast-cafe-bar.co.uk

Parking: West Street Car Park is the nearest.

Bookings: Optional.

Disabled access: Ground floor area is fine.

Opening times: Weekdays 9am-ish to 10pm (kitchen closes). Sunday 10.30am - 10pm (kitchen closes).

Vegetarian options: Ample.

Credit cards: Yes.

Value for money: 9/10

Life! rating: 9/10



(£4.45). Our other choices were Patas Bravas Con Queso Fundido - herb roasted potatoes topped with spicy tomato sauce and melted cheese (£3.25), Chorizo Frito Al Vino - sauté chorizo sausage cooked in red wine (£3.85), Gambasa De Catalana - sauté prawns in a pancetta and white wine cream sauce served on warm bruschetta (£4.25), Paella Verduras - seasonal paella vegetables cooked in white wine and served with saffron rice (£3.75) and Pollo Paprila - strips of chicken cooked in paprika and over roasted, served with salad garnish (£3.65).

Sorry, I know that reads like a GCSE test paper but when the restaurant has bothered to list everything in Spanish it's the least I can do - especially when the waiter apologized for one spelling mistake (which I'm still looking for!).

Each of the selections was ideal for sharing - and we could have certainly trimmed one from the six without going hungry. Did I

mention we'd ordered chunky chips too (£1.95)? My favourite was the steak - but then it would be wouldn't it? The chicken was a winner too and both the rice and potato dishes provided a pleasant vegetarian balance. We would sacrifice the prawns next time - they tasted fine but looked uninviting and had morphed with the pancetta. Likewise the chorizo tasted excellent but looked a little too oily. Did I mention the chunky chips were to die for? And there was no room left for dessert. To accompany we chose a bottle of La Pintora Sauvignon Blanc (£14.95) from the very reasonably priced wine list as well as a pint of Amstel (£2.80) and a bottle of water (£1.55).

We also finished with very good coffee (£1.55 a serving). All in all then a toast to Toast - though Oasis might have been a better name. The bill before gratuity was around £60.

Robin Duke

WINE CORNER

by Jacqueline Morley



REMEMBER the movie? Now the Three Amigos (Marsanne, Chardonnay and Rousanne) have got in on the wine act, in a delightfully tongue in cheek, and chic, way, thanks to Aussie winemakers McHenry Hehnen at Margaret River.

The grapes come from all over the place, but the character's very definitely grounded in honest to goodness fruit, a very distinctive and decisive, for all the blend, apricot, spice, vanilla, a full bodied, sleek white winner which is definitely not for wimps. £11.99 – shop around or check Planet of the Grapes and other suppliers on line.

Some great pot boilers for mid to late summer: Simonnet Febvre

Cremant de Bourgogne Pinot Noir is a fresh floral fizz made by the only company in Chablis with the dash and daring to produce a Cremant de Bourgogne.

Innovative stuff and an excellent aperitif pre-seafood barbecue. Worth seeking out as not widely available – £12.99.

Also watch out for lovely Louis Latour's Pouilly Vinzelles en Paradis '06, an aptly named heavenly white Burgundy from Maconnais, all flinty charm, flowers, heady dash of honey, and summer fruits. Majestic wine warehouses, and Gordons of Lancashire, stock it, from around a tenner.

Something drew me to the name of The First Lady '07, Stellenbosch, from the Warwick Estate, again around a tenner (try Waitrose if you spot a branch).

This is named in honour of Norma Ratcliffe, first lady of the South African wine industry, and is a classic, and very chocolatey, Cabernet Sauvignon based blend, all tart blackberries, with a touch of toffee and cinnamon. Gorgeous stuff.

For a sparkler bursting with summer try of Tesco Finest Bisol Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Spumante NV (pictured), £8.99 - all the fun of Harry's Bar in Venice at a fraction of the cost and without the mosquito bites!



TOP TIPPLE

A white and red share the top spot today, both French, Chateau Haut Selve '07 Graves, Bordeaux, around £14 from everywine.co.uk for a real grab bag of goodies, half Sauvignon Blanc, 40 per cent Semillon, the rest Sauvignon Gris. It comes with a rather self effacing "non novi sed nova", which kind of means nothing new, but try it from this perspective. And the contemporary twist works at treat. Try it. If it's got to be red, for the steeper price, we've previously raved over Chateau Grand Barrail Lamarzelle Figeac '05, and, frankly, while I'm not big on overstatements, this is luscious stuff. £17.99 from Sainsbury's for this lovely medley of 70 per cent Merlot, 30 per cent Cabernet Franc, so shop around for that special occasion.

Don't forget to send your booze news, clubs, favourite finds, swigs and tips to jacqui.morley@blackpoolgazette.co.uk