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# Making a grand debut

## FOOD AND DRINK

Green Dolphin Brasserie ★★★★★

**W**hen New Brighton's Floral Pavillon Theatre reopens in December, Kevin Lovelady will be toasting the first performance. The redevelopment of the theatre, and its associated schemes, were the catalyst for Lovelady opening his Green Dolphin Brasserie six months ago. Just round the corner from the venue, the restaurant will have throngs of potential customers.

Not surprisingly, though, New Brighton has already taken the Green Dolphin to its bosom; a midweek offer of £11.95 for two courses has undoubtedly helped, but so has the fact that Lovelady has created the ideal neighbourhood restaurant. It's a cosy escape from the windswept oddness of Victoria Parade, which leads down to the waterside. The food is home-made – the only things bought in are ice cream and puff pastry – and resolutely unfussy. The menu proudly names local businesses among the suppliers and explains any dishes or ingredients, such as the paneer in the curry, that might raise questions. It's a sensible way to run a restaurant and, with luck and patience, it will pay off.

The dining rooms extend over two floors: go upstairs for views and down for neat proximity to the bar and kitchen. On the ground floor it's very relaxed and tastefully neutral, with café-style chairs and harmless art, and a waiter always within range. Ours brought us home-made focaccia and large measures of the decent house Merlot (£3.50).

Chef Ross Gray has wisely elected not to overstretch his small team, and the menu runs to six starters, five mains and six desserts. We discovered too late, however, that the home-made brown sauce served with the corned beef hash is so popular that Lovelady is considering bottling it for sale. Instead, I chose the grilled mackerel fillet (£4.75), served with a crisp skin and a light horseradish crème fraîche dressing. Despite the rich fish and a none-too-sharp dressing on the accompanying beetroot salad, it didn't hit oil overload. My friend enjoyed a Portobello mushroom (£4.50) topped with a melted Brie, leek and toasted pine nuts.



Good neighbour: Green Dolphin Brasserie in New Brighton is serving quality, no-nonsense food

Picture: Sean Wilson

► The menu proudly names local businesses among the suppliers. It's a sensible way to run a restaurant and, with luck and patience, it will pay off ◀

The straightforward theme continued with a very good, wine-rich venison stew topped with a disc of buttery puff pastry (£9.75). Tender, flaky pieces of meat and little chestnut mushrooms provided ballast, and perfectly cooked new potatoes, carrots and peas sat awkwardly in a separate bowl. My friend hadn't anticipated a dark, rich sauce accompanying her free-range chicken with potato and feta pancake (£9.75), but the bacon added a powerful smokiness and the chicken's flavour demonstrated the point of choosing free range.

Dessert was perhaps a bit optimistic. We manfully conquered overstuffed banana crêpes with butterscotch sauce and clotted cream ice cream and chocolate swirl cheesecake (both £4.50). An orange syrup served to highlight the soft acidity of the cheesecake's filling,

but the pistachio crust was a bit lost under all the sweetness.

There are the odd missteps at the Green Dolphin, including menu notes that describe Blacksticks Blue, that king of soft, buttery blue cheeses, as a Cheddar, and the service of good home-made bread with olives that can most kindly be described as bog-standard. But there's not much else that's misplaced or misguided. This is a happy example of a restaurant where the customer comes first and gets a decent dinner into the bargain. Once the theatre crowds arrive, the Green Dolphin's efforts should be rewarded.

Emma Jean Sturgess

70 Victoria Parade, New Brighton, Wirral, Tue to Fri 5.30pm to 10.30pm, Sat 10am to 10.30pm and Sun 10am to 5pm. Tel: 0151 538 1166. www.greendolphinbrasserie.com