

IT DAWNED on me that it was a mistake parking behind the Brentwood Hotel in a space so tight I almost had to limbo-dance my way out of a narrow gap between my car and a wall. After a hearty three-course meal, and becoming what seemed like a few pounds heavier, it was an even bigger struggle to get back in. The car park behind the hotel is very handy, although spaces are at a premium, and I noted that Aberdeen City Council was still enthusiastically pursuing its quest to rake in as much cash from visitors as possible through its web of expensive park-and-display machines surrounding the Brentwood.

It's an annoying little stealth tax on people pouring money into the city's entertainment venues. Luckily, we soon fell into the more welcoming arms of the Brentwood, via a rear door and down some stairs into the subterranean bar and restaurant which sit below street level.

We decided on a pre-meal drink in the pleasant bar and seating area, while the friendly and helpful staff furnished us with menus so we could mull over our choices in advance. A few steps down off the bar area were the doors to the dining room – a far more modern affair than I had expected, with a low ceiling and a deceptively long smart-looking room arranged in two sections.

It was well staffed with friendly people and our Spanish waitress was by our side quickly for drinks orders. By

Spicy roasted monkfish and king prawns, with sweet chilli sauce, peppers and a ciabatta roll filled with lemon grass risotto



EatingOut

Hidden gem a joy to discover

the time she returned we had already settled on our choices for starters. For me, pheasant supreme on cranberry mash and red currant jus; for my wife, scallops with black pudding risotto, slices of apple and apple sauce.

I had often driven past the Brentwood, which sits in Crown Street, just off Union Street in the centre of Aberdeen, but it never occurred to me that it would offer such imaginative selections.

Pheasant has not often crossed my culinary path, but these were generous slices sitting on a fruity bed of cranberry mash. It was a lovely combination of tastes. It was a good-sized portion, much bigger than the recent measly penny-pinching starters I had seen elsewhere. It was the same story for my wife with her scallops and a large portion of black pudding risotto. The apple flavour was another nice contrast.

We gazed about – the room was moderately busy, but with a menu as nice as this there could well have been a number of regular non-residents here

as well as hotel guests sitting down to dinner. The ages of diners ran across the spectrum, with young families and older couples.

For mains, I chose spicy roasted monkfish and king prawns, with sweet chilli sauce, peppers and a ciabatta roll filled with lemon grass risotto. My wife could not resist breast of duck, in a cherry jus with two juicy cherries decorating the plate, and honey-roasted figs.

These dishes both had the wow factor in terms of looks and innovation. A lot of thought had gone into them and they really made you sit up and take notice of their striking good looks.

My monkfish dish was a dazzling combination of tastes and colours but, be warned, the chilli sauce gave it a rather fiery after-glow, which suited my taste. It was almost upstaged by the colourful risotto-stuffed bread – what a show-stealer that was, and I enjoyed every morsel of it. My wife's duck was a classy, understated contrast to my all-singing, all-dancing razzmatazz

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of a dish: a simple, yet generous, portion of duck breast with a rich fruity sauce and side vegetables.

We rounded off with a mixed fruit fondue for my wife and a chocolate cheesecake for me. Well, it was supposed to be for me, but once my wife's eyes came to rest on my glorious cheesecake, with chunky chocolate chips, a quick swap was brokered.

Our bill, with drinks, came to £71.

I am assuming everyone knows about the Brentwood but, if not, it might be one of those hidden gems which is worth adding to your collection.

■ **The Brentwood Hotel, 101 Crown Street, Aberdeen. Phone 01224 595440. E-mail: reservations@brentwood-hotel.co.uk or visit www.brentwood-hotel.co.uk**

QUALITY OF FOOD	5
MENU CHOICE	5
SURROUNDINGS	4
LOCATION	4
SERVICE	5
VALUE FOR MONEY	4
TOTAL [OUT OF 30]	27



Mixed fruit fondue. Photographs: Raymond Besant

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