



Magnum opus

Perth has not had that much to shout about in recent years but Opus One has put the fair city back on the culinary map



WORDS CATE DEVINE

Clockwise from top left: Clementine soup with pomegranate sorbet; Clash Farm pork fillet; Opus One's atmospheric interior; head chef Romi Denesle; Scottish salmon tartare and beetroot carpaccio.

Poor old Perth, where an evening stroll through the city centre only highlights the devastation of supermarket invasion and the silvery Tay brings forth discordant smells from the various Chinese or Indian restaurants that dot the streets of this once fair city.

At least, that's how it seemed to us as we searched to find Opus One, cosily ensconced inside the New County Hotel. It was a relief to find ourselves politely feted and ushered towards its dark wood and velvet interior. Good lighting and lots of glass enhanced the ambience of this tasteful space and although we were the only diners – after all, it was a cold and windy

Wednesday evening – the Normandy-born head chef Romuald Denesle was in, and we could hear him busily working away in the kitchen. A Stevie Wonder circa 1975 soundtrack was just loud enough to cover any embarrassment front of house, and did the trick by making us feel completely welcome. Thoughtful touches like that are worth their weight in gold.

Another good sign was the wine list, which offered a selection of incredibly well-priced half bottles. Our Cotes du Rhone (£15.50) was beautifully chambred and before long a pretty little pre-starter plate arrived. A seasonal pumpkin veloute with cinnamon and nutmeg was hot,



thick and darkly spicy, its little side salad of micro leaves with apple and sultanas enough to bite through its sweetness.

What was beginning to feel like a very sophisticated evening continued with a beautifully assured pressed terrine of foie gras, whose creamy liver flavour was the best we'd ever experienced, and whose texture was only enhanced by a sweet and crunchy layer of fig puree, all meltingly soft when spread over a slice of the thinnest, spiciest gingerbread toast. That match was a lovely idea, and one that worked brilliantly. I also loved the little buttons and squares of sweet wine jelly dotted around the plate, some painstakingly stuck with tiny leaves on top.

And the smoked milk froth on my confit sweet potato tortellini was a sensation, even if the flavour didn't last beyond the first hit. Who cares if froths are passé when they are as imaginative as this? But dinky Blue Monday cubes and salted toasted walnuts, drizzled jazzily with a sweet jus and a creamy blue cheese milk, were not quite enough to mask the truth: that this, and the five delicately fashioned homemade pasta parcels, were cold. Perhaps this was the intention, but I'd have thought even tepid would be slightly more on-trend than just plain cool. This was a pity, because the bright orange confit itself was intensely caramelly sweet and a fantastic match for the salty Blur bassist cheese.

Cured loin of Perthshire roe deer, served in seven rose-centred slices and with little pastry parcels of shoulder confit, was achingly delicious and certainly worth the attention of the Michelin inspectors. And I say that as someone who's not a huge fan of venison. So many elements on the plate – smears of butternut squash, little soufflés of potato, a bed of the neatest shreds of Savoy – made this a dish to savour for as long as possible. My two plump legs and breasts of delicately gamey pan-roasted Scottish partridge, too, was a thoughtfully constructed dish. Chef had matched the pale meat with a well-judged oblong slice of hearty haggis dauphinoise, and I loved the opaque little baby onions sitting in bright green Brussels sprout leaves and the yellow ellipse of good old Scottish turnip.

Just as well, then, that my clementine soup had such a citrusy punch. This was a jewel-coloured, light and playful end to a substantial meal: a ball of pomegranate sorbet sat on top of a bed of orange slivers and when your 'spoon' of cinnamon twist stirred it, it fell apart to release a mound of hidden ruby-red pomegranate seeds, all blending into the clementine soup like a fruity minestrone.

We left reluctantly, but seared by the impression left by Denesle. Might he open an Opus Two? And could it be in Glasgow, please? ☞

FIELD FACTS



PRICE: Dinner for two, with one pudding, one coffee and a half-bottle of wine: £76.75 (two courses are £25.50 and three £32).

RATING:

★★★★☆

New County Hotel,
22-30 County Place,
Perth PH2 8EE

Tel: 01738 623355.

www.opusone-restaurant.co.uk

Cate Devine is food writer at The Herald

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Six hidden gems

THE OYSTERCATCHER, ARGYLL



One of the most picturesque pubs in Scotland is under new management and the food has improved out of all recognition. Open Friday, Saturday and

Sunday over the winter, this stunning lochfront inn is family-friendly and well worth a visit. 01700 821229; www.theoystercatcher.co.uk

ARISAIG HOUSE, NEAR MALLAIG



Once Michelin-starred and Relais & Chateau, Arisaig House was recently bought by two sisters, Emma and Sarah, who have opened a restaurant specialising

in local, seasonal food, which is building up a strong loyal following from a standing start. 01687 450730; www.arisaighouse.co.uk

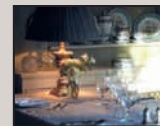
STEIN INN, WATERNISH, SKYE



There are any number of top-end restaurants on Skye, but Angus and Teresa McGhie's outstanding little inn is where many of the locals prefer to eat.

Try the breast of duck with garlic cider cream sauce, venison pie, or scallops in oatmeal. 01470 592362; stein-inn.co.uk

EDENWATER HOUSE, EDNAM, KELSO



Based in an old stone manse in the small village of Ednam, chef Jacqui Kelly produces tip-top fine dining fare that is worth every penny of the £37.50 set menu

price. Husband Jeff runs the Wine Shed next door, which means that the wine list is a thing of joy. 01573 224070; www.edenwaterhouse.co.uk

THE SEABED, TARBERT, ARGYLL



Housed inside the Anchor Hotel on the quay in the pretty little harbour village, the Seabed Restaurant is my brother-in-law's favourite, and with seafood just

out of the water, he's got a point. Although it's not cheap, it's very good (try the platter). 01880 820577; www.lochfynescotland.co.uk

COW SHED, BANCHORY, ABERDEEN



Named after the building this new-built restaurant looks out on, The Cow Shed has kicked up a storm in the North East with chef Graham Buchan's polished and

reassuringly expensive classic combinations appealing to Aberdeen's rich oilmen. 01330 820813; www.cowshedrestaurantbanchory.co.uk

YOUR SAY

DO YOU AGREE WITH RICHARD BATH'S CHOICES? LET US KNOW YOUR OPINION ON OUR FORUM AT WWW.SCOTTISHFIELD.CO.UK

