

The Grazing Goat

Goats like to live in sociable groups and The Grazing Goat is no exception. Part of the Cubitt House group, which includes The Thomas Cubitt, The Orange and The Pantechnicon it's a relatively new member of the herd, although a very ancient animal.

But then this is an old area of London. New Quebec Street in Portman Village is only a souvenir's throw away from the bustle of Oxford Street and yet it has kept the cosy feel of the small village it once was. In fact the Goat's name comes from the fact that the area was originally farmland where goats grazed to produce milk for the first Lady Portman.

The Cubitt House Group have made a speciality of finding such old, often rather neglected, properties and bringing them brightly back to life as pubs and boutique hotels through sympathetic restoration and real design feel.

At the Goat the feel is 'country house' although which country is debatable. America's New Hampshire or Vermont is what first springs to mind, as the building has a clean, crisp freshness that makes you think of blue skies, deep forests and healthy living.

And wood is everywhere at the Goat - on the floor, on the walls and on the ceiling in the form of massive beams. So much wood that a pleasant oaky aroma fills the air as you climb the small staircase to reception from the bar below. Down there people are tucking into cocktails and good-looking food and the windows are thrown open to the street of Georgian houses and boutique shops.

The first floor restaurant is all wooden tables of various shapes and sizes, which gives a nicely informal air. A bit too informal as, because the restaurant reception is also the hotel reception, you have to stand about getting in everyone's way while waiting for someone to become free to check you in. After that though it's a few more stairs up into the hotel area.

The bedroom and bathroom are picture perfect; the bathroom is all wood and slate and the suite is beautifully art-directed with nice touches such as replica table lights, old-style wall fans and caged lamps suspended from cords. It's a room that feels more like one in the house you can see opposite and that's a good thing. You can imagine that you too are wealthy enough to have a house in central London and a soft-top Aston Martin parked outside.

Scallops with pea purée and pea shoots is a classic gastropub style starter, the scallops caramelised outside, tenderly cooked inside and a generous portion. Why pea purée works so well with scallops is a mystery but it certainly does. Chilli salt squid with lime could have done with more spikes of chilli but was a decent take on another very popular dish in town these days.

It was Sunday so one of us had to have a roast, in this case 28 day dry aged Castle of Mey beef rump. The rump was served whole, so it was really more like eating a steak and I think beef should always be served sliced on Sundays. Better was pan fried cod, leeks, baby artichokes, lemon butter sauce with the cod crispy-skinned, the artichokes tender and the lemon butter sauce well worth mopping up with some bread, had there been any bread offered.

The white chocolate tart, raspberry compote and honeycomb ice cream was good, but the blueberry and apple pie and vanilla ice cream could have had a few more blueberries.

It was good to stroll outside after and know bed was just a street or two away. The bed was big and comfortable so we woke refreshed for a bright English breakfast in the street level bar, watching the world go by through the open French windows.

Hotels in London can be mean, depressing affairs even when you pay through the nose. Far better to get your head down and graze at the Goat and properly enjoy a capital night out. ■

