

LOCAL FOOD HEROES



Jan Strange with handmade meringues

STEPHEN WHEELER, commercial manager at speciality food company *Mise en Place*, now part of Cheltenham-based *Creed Foodservice*, is responsible for sourcing the best food ingredients for top chefs across the country

THERE is some dispute as to whether the 17th century recipe for “white biscuit bread” by the English Lady Elinor Fettiplace, or whether the confection first baked by a Swiss pastrycook in the small German town of Meiringen, was the first “meringue”, but there’s no argument today that some of the most delicious ones are being made by sisters Jan and Lisa at The Cotswold Handmade Meringue Company in Nailsworth.

Jan and Lisa’s mum, Muriel, first started piping out meringues in her kitchen at home for the family grocery store in Tetbury 28 years ago.

They became so popular that long after the shop closed, the meringues are still being made to Muriel’s original recipes, in 48 separate domestic-sized ovens cleverly lined and stacked in a converted woollen mill, overlooking the tranquil mill-pond.

I asked the sisters why not just one big commercial oven?

“These ovens give us an even, perfect temperature for the meringues, and we like to stick as closely to possible to our homemade recipes and methods,” said Lisa. “We use fresh egg-white and insist on no chemical additives. Mass produced meringues are

made from powdered eggs, with all kinds of stabilisers and gums,” she added.

The egg and sugar mixture is expertly hand-piped from a large bag about the size and shape of a set of bagpipes.

Using over 6 tonnes of egg-white and 26 tonnes of sugar a year, over a million whirls, nests and kisses – flavoured with hazelnuts, chocolate, coconut and cinnamon – are hand crafted.

Staff with over 12 years experience can make a plate sized meringue in less than a minute.

“Over half of what we make is sold locally,” said Lisa. “Delicatessens, farm shops, pubs and restaurants make up our customer base, but some of the top-end supermarkets are also now showing an interest.

“We’ve re-designed our range and packaging, and are excited about future business prospects.”

Queen Marie Antoinette had a penchant for meringues, and she used to insist on making them with her own hands, at the Trianon palace in Paris.

Having tasted some of the Cotswold Handmade Meringues with whipped cream, lemon curd and fresh raspberries, I’d say they were most definitely fit for royalty.

Mise en Place
THE SPECIALITY FOOD COMPANY

Where town meets country

ANY talk of pubs struggling during the recession evaporates as soon as you step into *The Langton* in Charlton Kings.

If anything, the gastropub in London Road has expanded in the past couple of years with the dining area now spilling over into the bar.

We booked a table on a Friday night and the place was absolutely heaving.

There were parents enjoying a pizza supper with their teenagers, people who had popped in for an after-work drink and couples like us, who were treating themselves to dinner at the end of a busy week.

It’s a similar story on Sundays with every table packed and little chance of finding any space if you turn up on spec.

So what’s its secret? Clearly, *The Langton* isn’t your average pub. It definitely veers more towards the restaurant side than a place purely to go for a drink, although there are comfy seats to grab in the bar if you get there early.

The Langton is part of a chain and has a successful sister pub near Bath too.

The grand building has been tastefully transformed with chunky wooden furniture and Asian-inspired pieces such as a large Buddha head and Chinese-style cabinets.

It has wonderful high ceilings which add to the sense of space, although you can’t quite appreciate it when you’re three deep at the bar.

As well as the oriental theme, there are also country touches in one of the dining areas including a chandelier made of driftwood and duck egg-coloured walls which is perhaps where it gets its ‘country pub’ tag from as it is located firmly on the edge of the town.

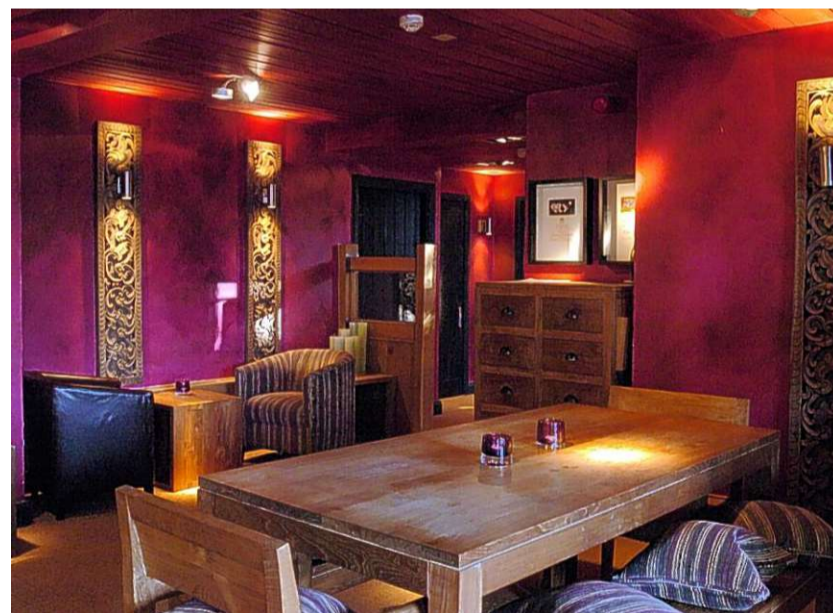
The food at *The Langton* is simple, with a strong Italian theme, but carried off with flair. There is plenty of choice, even for the fussiest of eaters (hence the abundance of teenagers) including fired pizzas, salads, pasta, fish and steaks.

We had to wait a little while for our table to become free so asked to look at the wine list. The house wine is £14.50 rising to £39.95 for a bottle of Valpolicella.

We found a corner to sip our glasses of mid-range Montepulciano in and were soon called through to the adjacent dining area which only had a few tables in.

It was nice to escape the crowds. We began by sharing a plate of garlic pizzette, rocket and parmesan (£5.95) which arrived on a large circular plate and was a delicious wafer-thin dough infused with the strong garlic and rocket flavours.

It was lovely and light, with plenty to share between two, and just took the



The bar area

edge off our hunger without filling us up too much.

For the main course, Nick ordered a margherita pizza (£6.95) with jalapenos to spice it up a bit (you can add your own toppings for £1 a go) while I went for the farfalloni with leeks, peas, tomato, smoked peppers and pecorino (£9.95).

The Italian-style pizza had a satisfying wood fired taste although it could have done with a bit more tomato to mozzarella ratio.

My pasta looked just like farfalle, with a fancier name, and was delicious. I’m a big fan of having plenty going on with pasta, rather than just smothering it in a bland sauce.



THE LANGTON

Address: London Road, Cheltenham

Food: Pizza, pasta and salads

Atmosphere: Thriving

Service: Generally good

Price: Appetisers from £3.95, mains from £6.95, puddings from £4.45

Contact: 01242 233022/
www.thelangton.co.uk

This ticked all the boxes with juicy leeks and peas, al dente pasta and the smoked pepper adding a flavoursome punch.

We didn’t want a dessert each so decided to share a raspberry tiramisu with crushed amaretti biscuits (£4.95).

We were a bit surprised that it arrived in a chilled tumbler, rather than being a slab on a plate, but that didn’t stop us polishing it off.

The Langton has a winning formula for serving up simple and hearty food in stylish surroundings.

Just opt for a later arrival if you want to avoid being squeezed in between the 14-year-olds.

Lucy Parford