

From The Sunday Times

February 10, 2008

Restaurant review: Michael Winner at Fishpot, Barbados

The highlight of this year's Barbadosing

Michael Winner

Barbados has many charms but it's certainly not the culinary hot spot of the world. That's putting it mildly.

Although the Sandy Lane food dipped last Christmas-New Year I still ate 35 lunches and dinners there, only going out seven times. Two of those outings were to a restaurant I'd never visited in my 25 years of Barbadosing, the **Fishpot**.

It's absolutely terrific. Far better than that so-called "great" Barbados dump, the **Cliff**, which is the most overbooked, second-rate place in the world. When tour operators sell their packages they suggest booking key restaurants even if it's a year in advance. So everyone makes bookings. When they get there they change their minds. It's chaos.

Last time I went to the Cliff I got a New York steak, supposedly medium rare, which consisted of four separate slices of beef overdone beyond belief. The arrogant girls who run it behave as if they're bestowing a favour letting you in. There are very few good tables. Usually I found myself in an alley with a high-rise rock on one side and black sea (it was night) on the other.

Daphne's, another useless waste of time, occasionally has reasonable food but the service is so slow everyone complains in high volume.

The Fishpot, on the other hand, is a delight. You turn left out of Sandy Lane and drive 25 minutes, passing endless hoardings hiding upcoming apartment blocks and foreboding signs on wasteland reading, "Prime residential site for sale". Eventually you come to old Barbados.

There are little wooden houses, market stalls by the beach, cane fields and an aura of better times. At the Fishpot you sit right by the sea, in an old 17th-century fort. It's also a 21-room hotel. It's tranquil. It's beautiful. It's what Caribbean life should be.

Andrew Warden, the owner, is Australian. Actually I didn't put that on my tape so he could be from Uruguay, China, Ethiopia or anywhere. But I'm sure he said he was Australian.

The superb restaurant manager, Trevor Paris, is Barbadian, so is their excellent chef, Stephen Belgrave. The service is wonderful. The minute you finish your plate beautifully dressed local waitresses remove it.

I went first for lunch with my favourite interior decorator, Richard Hanlon. I returned with magnum-plus music mogul Lucian Grainge and his wife for dinner. Lucian was driving and followed my directions. Always a mistake. We found ourselves nowhere near the sea, surrounded by cane fields.

I phoned the restaurant and spoke to someone who told me we'd passed the place. "Stay on the line," I commanded, "Don't leave the phone. If you leave the phone I'll die. I'm dying."

"If you're dying I'll have to call my superior," uttered the voice in panic. Thus someone else guided us back to the Fishpot. There was a left turn I'd forgotten about. That's how Mark Thatcher got lost in the desert, if you remember the case.

Let's talk food now. For lunch the Fishpot had fresh local lobsters, which is more than Sandy Lane could offer at the time. They presented lobsters from Belize. Must have been on ice so long all their spirit and structure had departed.

At the Fishpot I started with a perfect pina colada followed by a mixed fish platter, including lobster, clams, sardines, smoked salmon. I had a tiny cup of its fish chowder to taste. Marvellous. Geraldine had flying fish with salad. Loved it.

Everything was so fresh. Richard had grilled dolphin with salad and chips. My lobster had an incredible butter sauce, I don't know what they put in it, but it was fantastic. They even served Evian water in a bottle.

My dessert was homemade apple pie, and tasted like one. Geraldine had coconut crême brûlée, which was superb. Richard had cheesecake. I tried that too. Impeccable.

On the return journey I noticed more building – "Woodpecker apartments now for sale". What a nightmare.

Back at Sandy Lane, in my role as an unpaid agent for restaurant staff, I'd got them Manny Ward, a fantastic local fellow, to

be the new manager of Bajan Blue, the hotel's beach-side dining area. That meant service was far better than the previous year.

His second-in-command, Jazz Bovell, is probably the worst restaurant employee ever. But Barbadians, including Wade, an undermanager who should be promoted, also waiters Nicholas, Cathy, Jane and many others are a delight.

Another Sandy Lane employee who deserves to be moved up the totem pole is Eric Mapp, the hotel's resident manager. He's Barbadian, been there forever (but not as long as me) and unlike some of Sandy Lane's staff knows what he's doing. It's always nice to end on a positive note. Quite unusual, really.

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