

Silver Medal. Christmas is Here. January Inbound.

On the 15th November this month we gained further recognition from the Carlsberg Northamptonshire Food & Drink Awards. We were awarded runner up in the best restaurant category, a title that we won in 2015. We couldn't be more proud to have entered twice and to have achieved a podium finish on both occasions. We send our heartfelt thanks to our team and our loyal customers, without whom we would not be here.

WINNER



RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

The 1st and 2nd places

RUNNER-UP



RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR



5 seconds before and after the award

The competition this year was high, and we offer our heartfelt congratulations to all the entrants as well as all the winners. Next year possibly...

Coupled with this competition, not only did we turn 3, and celebrated with a sell out weekend, but we also got a review in the Sunday Telegraph. Not something that happens every day to a restaurant in these here parts...

So all in all as we enter our fourth Christmas season and fourth year of trading we are smiling. We still have spaces available for key dates including Christmas Eve, Boxing Day, New Years Eve and New Years day. As you are possibly already aware, we close down for a bit of a break from the 2nd to the 4th of January and re open as usual on Friday the 5th.

****For the duration of January on Thursday and Friday nights we will be offering 50% off all prosecco at the bar or restaurant to make the new year bills a bit easier to handle. Plus everyone likes prosecco right?****

May the faucet be with you

TABLE FOR TWO

A modest riverside bar and restaurant impresses **Keith Miller**

Oundle in Northamptonshire is a strikingly pretty town: not quite Cotswolds-pretty or Harry Potter-pretty, but in that ballpark. It has a Victorian Gothic public school where the girls get to wear these huge David Bowie-ish trousers though they'd suit the boys better if you ask me.

It also has its own oolitic limestone formation, which you really need if you want to get ahead in the pretentious stakes; there are quarries all down the Nene Valley's western side.

Thirdly, it has the Nene itself, the 10th-longest river in the UK, which joins the Grand Junction Canal outside Northampton, so you could, in theory, take a little boat all the way from the Thames at Brentford, west of London, to the Wash, avoiding the fleshpots of Printon-on-Sea and the great gluteal convexity of East Anglia. And if that doesn't make your heart swell to bursting at the sheer wonder of the world, then it must be made of stone, oolitic or otherwise.

So Tap & Kitchen sits right on the Nene, at the edge of Oundle, in a little compound of new industrial buildings. Built, one presumes, on the site of a little compound of old industrial buildings, relics of which T&K has put on show both inside and out as a testament to an earlier chapter in the life of the place, in the manner of the mastodon skulls discovered on the Isle of Capri in the time of Augustus, which proved it had once been joined on to the mainland, and which the emperor proudly displayed in the gardens of his villa.

T&K is an offshoot of the famed Nene Valley Brewery. We'd put it on our list because it seemed to be representative of some broader trend: a new dispensation between pub and restaurant, an exemplary "new vernacular" menu (grills, salads, a dash of Ottolenghi, three quite recherché pizzas, some more ambitious choices in the evening, lots of home-made elements throughout). I had expected it to be a bit more hipsterishly self-



AND IT STONED ME
Tap & Kitchen has an exemplary "new vernacular" menu



aware and less eager to please than turned out to be the case - that's what its laconic name would have signalled in London, at any rate. The space is open-plan, but subdivided by decor - there's a pubby bit with a bar, high tables, a wood-burning stove and steam-age paraphernalia hanging; a

restauranty bit, with a higher ceiling, a carpet that would drive my cats into a berserker frenzy and curtains on the windows; and some sort of VIP area at the far end where, I presume, the stars of Oundle's hip-hop scene come to disport themselves.

The food was not show-stoppingly good, but it was quickly, consistently better-than-OK. Tea-poached duck breast toyed with a Chinese-restaurant cliché, laid atop a finger-sized blob of spring onion purée and scattered with charred pickled cucumber - though cooked thus, the meat was taut and almost metallic, and didn't have the sticky sweetness of its crispy aromatic counterpart. Hanger steak - "the butcher's cut", they call it, though maybe that's because you only get half a kilo or so of it per cow rather than because it's the best-tasting bit of the beast - came medium rare, well rested, sliced thickly, beautifully tender, nicely seasoned, with a festooning of watercress, a pot of minty-sweet "house chimichurri" and decent chips.

Puddings were grown-up takes on well-worn crowd-pleasers, accompanied by touchingly reticent wine recommendations: "Lemon posset, meringue, chantilly, lemon marmalade - perhaps a glass of palazzina?" Wine in general seemed intelligently chosen - they serve the lovely Château de Lascaux Pic St-Loup, the house wine of St John, in a box, by the glass at significantly sub-Johnnina prices.

In fact, that whole St John thing of plainish/British cooking, "plus the odd summer in the Dordogne", as someone waggishly said recently, represents one road down which somewhere like T&K,

starting from scratch in an area as knee-deep as Oundle obviously is in fantastic suppliers, might have gone. But I think they were right to set their parameters just a little wider.

What they are doing isn't wildly innovative. Many conventional pubs serve food that's more ambitious. Most other national papers might not think it worth reviewing at all.

But mid-lunch, with a cube of steak poised on my fork and "Cleaning Windows" by Van Morrison playing at a polite volume, and all the punters chattering and munching away (or, in the case of my neighbour, playing the derivatives market on his laptop), snug in their gleets or basking in the fug of the stove, I had a flashback to the mid-Eighties, when I got my first and, sadly, last pair of huge David Bowie-ish trousers, and when eating out, mostly, still meant deep-fried pub food, generic Indian or Chinese restaurants, doughy pizza or a well-done puke of rump steak at a Berni Inn.

The T&K template of a flexible and, in truth, fairly characterless, but far from unwelcoming, space, where ingredients of good quality and/or local provenance are prepared to simple but by no means unvarying recipes, and accessorised with a bit of spice and the odd fashionable flourish (lobster oil) is one that could well be imitated more widely. It knocks the endless cavalcade of Las Vegas, Jamie's Italians, Real Greeks, Cabanas and Bill'ses - the Berni Inns de nos jours - that now dominate Britain's townscapes into a cocked hat, anyway.

Oundle Wharf, Station Road, Oundle, Northants PE8 4DE 01832 275069; tapandkitchen.com

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Sunday December 3rd Restaurant Review

The Telegraph came in for lunch, maybe you should too... We have on the menu (outside of December) 2 courses for £12 and 3 for £15 as well as a sandwich or salad plus a side and a hot or cold drink for a tenner. During December our festive lunches are 2 courses for £18 and 3 for £22. We serve freshly baked pizza as well as many other dishes to suit a range of tastes.



Warner Edwards & Beetroot cured Gravavlax



Home cured coppa, Wigsthorpe ham, peaches and figs

Seasonal menu changes highlight some fantastic new starters and mains, as well as some new puddings coming in over the last remaining weeks of the year. Sure enough we have sprouts and figgy pudding on there, but many many more as well.

The menu is being updated daily with so many new dishes, as well as utilising our swaps system for some of the finest game and vegetables in the area. We are always grateful to our horde of growers, gardeners, farmers and shooters.



Local pheasant breasts, parsnip puree, sprouts, chestnuts, berries and parkin

If you are wanting to book your festive parties, get in touch quickly as the dates are filling up. We would love to see you down at the wharf this December.

A reminder to check out the opening times for the brewery shop over at NVB – open extra hours over the festive season for beer, gift vouchers, brewery tours, tee shirts, caps and did we mention beer? ...oh, and beer...

Best wishes,

TK