

“THE WOLSELEY OF THE SOUTH-EAST”

By Sudi Pigott

“author of the best seller “ How To be A Better Foodie”

Have you noticed? Chapters has a nonchalant new swagger which it wears with consummate ease. It’s no wonder, among gastro-savvy pundits, it’s being talked about as The Wolseley of the South-East for its winning brasserie luxe combination of flexible, affordable all-day menu. Like the Wolseley (the famous West End Grand Café constantly frequented by the A-list film and media crowd), it offers both gourmet and favourite comfort dishes with a twist, has a glamorous yet laid-back ambience and a frisson of people-watching possibilities.

Welcoming, stylish with the unmistakable buzz of a burgeoning hotspot, Chapters is the brainchild of the same dream team who created the iconic Chapter Two. The meticulous attention to detail and excellent service remain matched by a shift to a more informal approach to dining and more wallet-friendly pricing to match its all day ethos. Michelin have already recognised Chapters is offering a fiendishly spot-on package absolutely in tune with the times by giving it a highly covetable Bib Gourmand a mere four months after opening. Significantly it is the only restaurant in Blackheath to rate such distinction and there are fewer than twenty Bib Gourmand’s throughout London – high praise indeed for Chapter’s triple helping of cooking, atmosphere and pricing.

What’s more chef Trevor Tobin still heads up the kitchen and is wearing his haute cuisine training more lightly in the best possible sense. The menu mixes classics to gladden the heart – definitive fish and chips served on a wooden board and proper caesar salad with aged parmesan and anchovies - with touches of sheer culinary originality and brilliance: ratte potatoes, truffle mayo and caper and raisin dressing and sea bream with ragout of Jerusalem artichokes, salsify, cos lettuce and creamy wild mushrooms for those after more gastronomic adventure. Plus the blackboard flags up dishes of the day making full use of seasonal ingredients at their prime.

Better still Chapters steaks are cooked in the searing heat of one of London’s rare Jospo charcoal ovens (currently the most sought after kit among chefs) that gives outstandingly good crust whilst leaving the steaks pleasingly juicy – and served with textbook perfect crisp, yet fluffy within chips.

Crucially, Chapters is as much a meeting place as a dining venue. Ideal for breakfast think-tanks (there’s Continental, Full-English and even American options such as pancakes and maple syrup), post-gym or school-run cappuccino and treats, afternoon tea girly get-togethers and children’s high teas. And that’s not to mention Chapters sensational weekend brunch when booking is crucial as the occasion’s fame and largesse has spread far beyond the village.

Like at the Wolseley it's not simply about the menu, everything else matters deeply from crisp napkins, to the crema on the espresso and the welcome given to everyone: children (who love the hot chocolate with marshmallows year-round), regulars and first-timers adding up to a pleasurable sense of well-being. Chapters has more than a touch of the grand café about it too with its glass frontage and pavement seating opposite the heath, its impressive zinc bar, sweeping staircase, black and white photographs and utterly modish olive green banquettes and covetable silk Clarissa Hulse cushions. It's an uplifting mix of continental elan and very British integrity: undoubtedly a new brasserie legend in the making.

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Sudi writes regularly for Time magazine, American Express Centurion Magazine, The London magazine and many others