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Three Bridges, Battersea, London

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The Tree Bridges, Battersea

The Three Bridges

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For a city of eight million people, London has few really good local Italian restaurants. Chains dominate. And the consequences? Bland pastas, below average pizzas, risk-free menus, and a bill that's usually higher than you expect. In short, an experience that's as authentically Italian as a garibaldi. So when a good local Italian comes along, you root for it; you want it to do well.

The Three Bridges doesn't sound like much an Italian restaurant, and its location - near the dogs home in Battersea - is a bit off the beaten track too. But it has everything you'd want from a mid-priced local: excellent cooking, charming and knowledgeable service, and a menu that offers both old favourites and the odd provocation, such as pan-fried duck with rhubarb and plum sauce. Prices are reasonable: mains vary from £9.00 to £14.50.

We started by sharing a pizza, which was thinner than is traditional - our host Antonio Lombardi explained that regulations prevent them having a wood-fired oven, so they've had to improvise. They use buffalo mozzarella not fior de latte, for instance, because it works better with the heat of their oven. The pizza certainly worked: the freshly-made dough was wafer light and moreish, and the balance between sauce, cheese and toppings spot on. Breads are a real speciality here: later we had focaccia with mozzarella, rosemary and tomato which, though simple, was highly memorable because of the sheer quality of the ingredients.

That's a recurring theme at the Three Bridges. A caprese lives or dies by the quality of its three elements: here the buffalo mozzarella oozed creaminess and a slight yoghurt tang, the tomatoes had a perkiness and flavour that's rare in mid-spring, and the basil lingered long enough to make its point. Similarly, a warm salad of goats cheese, tomato and pesto hit the mark because of the freshness and zing of the home-made pesto.

When it came to mains, my gnocchi with broad beans, peas and chives was exemplary. The crunch of the beans and peas was neatly offset by the give in the gnocchi, and a light drizzling of truffle oil added some necessary muscle. My dining partner, meanwhile, chose what turned out to be the only so-so dish of the night: a pumpkin and goat's cheese ravioli with red pesto sauce. It wasn't bad at all, there just wasn't enough contrast between the sweetness of the filling and the sweetness of the sauce. Afterwards, we had just enough space in our rapidly-swelling stomachs to share a chocolate fondant, which was so good and gooey our spoons became swords as we fought for the last piece.

The Three Bridges is only a few months old, and it may take time to make itself known to the world. Indeed, it was only two-thirds full on our visit last Thursday. But a choice between another bog-standard chain and food of this quality should be a no-brainer; you just hope the good will out. And soon too.

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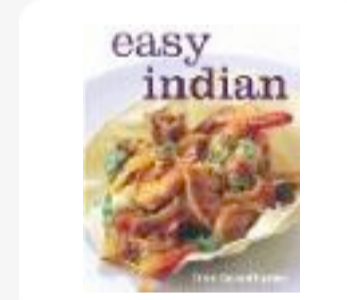
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