

## DINING OUT

## Brasserie's an unbeaten old master

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OliverOLIVER, BRASSERIE FORTY  
4, LEEDS

IT'S BECOME a sad but unavoidable fact of life in Leeds that restaurants can come and go in the blink of an eye.

One minute a colourful new venue will pop up, bright lights, exciting décor, full of energy and ambition, the next it will have vanished, with nothing but some leftover branding and a shiny "to let" sign to show it was ever there.

Perhaps it's indicative of the tough economic times, but I prefer to think it's down to the sheer volume of quality places to eat that the city now boasts.

With more competition than ever, only the strong survive and there's not many people better than us Leeds folk at voting with our feet.

But how have we gotten to be quite so good at separating the good from the not so good?

For that we can thank the small but significant number of restaurants dotted around the city which have true staying power and which act as our gold standard.

Falling firmly into that category is Brasserie Forty 4, which has occupied its tasteful site for as long as Oliver can recall.

It was very easy to see why when my companion and I paid a visit one pleasant summer evening. Location wise, you just couldn't pick a better place for a restaurant.

The imposing, brick building and understated entrance ooze class, as do the subtle lighting, rich, dark coloured décor and the low ceiling, all of which combine to leave you in no doubt whatsoever that you're in a place that knows how to make you feel a bit special.

Then there's the view. Now, Oliver has eaten in most of the city's best and brightest but there's very few indeed that can hold a candle to Brasserie Forty 4's beautiful view out over the River Aire, particularly at this time of year.

Once we were shown to our table, we wasted no time in taking it all in while we browsed the menu along with the extensive wine list.

There's an a la carte menu as well as a set menu too



**STAYING POWER:** Brasserie Forty 4, in an imposing brick building with views over the River Aire, oozes class.

along with a selection of daily specials. The menu is small, but that didn't stop us struggling for quite some time to narrow it down.

Eventually we were both able to tear ourselves away long enough to make our choices, and my companion opted for the chicken liver parfait to start, which was served with a spiced fruit chutney and granary croutons.

A triumph of a simple dish done well, the parfait was smooth in texture with a rich, full flavour that worked well with the spicy, piquant chutney.

For my own starter, I chose a ham hock and chicken terrine, which was served

with apricots and Grand Marnier. The terrine itself was absolutely delicious and beautifully presented – packed together in a little square that was bursting with heavy, meaty flavour.

I have to admit I was a tad sceptical about the apricots, but soaked as they were in the liquor, they actually worked exceptionally well as a lighter

**“Location wise, you just couldn't pick a better place for a restaurant.”**

counterpoint to the strong flavour of the terrine.

Other starters that caught our eye included whipped goat's cheese with apple jelly and some seared king scallops, but we were more than satisfied with our choices.

Starters average at around £6.50.

The main course selections were still fairly limited but there were so many big dishes among the choices that again we struggled to decide. My companion decided on fish cakes, which was one of the specials.

In keeping with her starter, the dish was another example of something very simple done incredibly well. Three

very large balls of salmon and asparagus coated in a crisp coating doesn't sound like much but when it's as tender and well-cooked as this was, it really couldn't be faulted.

For my own main course, I ordered the venison haunch which was served with shallots and thyme and covered in a juniper sauce. The venison was very slightly overcooked (I'd ordered it medium rare) but in truth that did little to lessen the quality of the dish.

The meat was tender and juicy, with the whole shallots roasted and laid on top.

The juniper sauce was quite thin in consistency but was punchy and light, in contrast to the gamey flavour

## FACTFILE

- **ADDRESS:** Brasserie Forty 4, 44 The Calls, Leeds LS2 7EW
- **OPENING TIMES:** Lunch Mon-Fri 12noon - 2pm, Sat 1pm - 3pm, Dinner Mon - Fri 5.30pm - 9.30pm, Sat 5pm - 10pm.
- **TEL:** 0113 234 3232.
- **WEBSITE:** www.brasserie44.com.

## STAR RATING

- **Food** ★★★★★
- **Value** ★★
- **Atmosphere** ★★★★★
- **Service** ★★★★★

of the venison. I had also been tempted by the pork tenderloin with Parma ham or the peppered steak, and there's a nice balance to the main course selections between meat, fish and vegetarian options.

The main courses cost around £15 but side dishes are ordered separately.

To go with my own main, I ordered some hand cut chips, which were light and fluffy inside and came in a huge stack.

My companion ordered some new potatoes with minted butter, which were perfectly cooked, and we also ordered some spinach with nutmeg which was surprisingly tasty and delightfully different.

Already fit to burst, we could both have been forgiven for skipping dessert, but we decided to have a look at the menu anyway.

My companion ordered a lemon and almond cake, which was served with amaretto cream and candied lemon zest.

A very thick slab of cake that proved rather difficult to finish, it was nevertheless a great dessert, with the lemon and almond contrasting nicely and the cake soft and a little bit crumbly.

My own eyes were instantly drawn to the chocolate fondue, and I wasn't disappointed.

A huge pile of marshmallows, fruit and berries served with a put of rich, hot chocolate to dip it into isn't something you can really go wrong with and I somehow managed to devour the whole lot.

Along with a splendid bottle of wine, the bill came to a not inconsiderable £92.

And despite the hefty price tag, restaurants new and old in Leeds still have a lot to live up to if they want to top this old master.