

○ FOOD REVIEW

Nothing was too much trouble for this place



EASY CHOICE - The prawns were plump, mildly spiced and beautifully presented.

We were looking for a place to take a friend to lunch on his birthday; there were to be four of us and as one of our party favoured less exotic food, we wanted somewhere that offered a menu that would suit everyone. D suggested Restaurant 88.

The trishaw parked outside, the green lanterns, palms and the sun through wood-slatted blinds all added to the atmosphere of this restaurant and with its Vietnamese, and what it calls Metropolitan dishes, it seemed ideal.

French toast with bacon, banana and crème fraiche suited the more conservative taste of one guest, D ordered Vietnamese wok-flushed prawns, I chose chilli-spiced fish wrapped in banana leaf and after an eternity of dithering, Birthday Boy finally decided to have drunken crispy salt and pepper poussin.

The meals were all beautifully presented, feasts to the eye, even the café standard of French toast, bacon and banana looked far more exciting than it usually does. D's prawns plump and



○ GERALD BRYAN

shelled but with heads and tails intact and cooked with a mildly spiced and sweet pickle sauce, were piled beside a timbale of steamed rice garnished with caramelised onions. A finger bowl arrived before she even thought of asking. Birthday Boy's whole chicken had been steamed then fried before being

jointed and heaped with some salad leaves beside rice, a bowl of peppercorns and sea salt and two dipping sauces. Another finger bowl appeared. My fish with a sauce of chilli, tamarind and other Vietnamese seasonings and garnished with a large prawn, shared the banana leaf in which it had been cooked with steamed rice and a simple and refreshing salad, albeit with things that looked like tomatoes but didn't taste like anything. We were all happy with our main courses although both D and I thought that our meals, which were listed on the menu as either being chilli-spiced or having Vietnamese spices, could perhaps have been a bit perkier without spoiling the integrity of the dishes.

Being something of a celebration, I insisted Birthday Boy had a dessert and he enjoyed the rather grand-sounding Royal Tahitian vanilla and ginger crème brûlée served with ice cream which he and it were generous enough to share. We also shared a cheese board, which was average and made me wish restaurants would only offer individual cheeses at their prime rather than out of condition supermarket selections from the fridge.

We drank Wither Hills Sauvignon Blanc from a pleasant wine list and there was also a premium wine list for those wishing to push the boat out further. They have a good selection of beers although one wonders how many of them listed as imported, actually come from Auckland.

The service was good and by allowing us to choose from both day and dinner menus, we were made to feel that nothing was too much trouble. Birthday Boy had a very Happy Birthday.

The meal with two bottles of wine and coffee came to \$198.50.