

Table for TWO

with Basil & Saffron



BASIL is in jocular mood. At first I am unsure why. Has he met someone else? Has he test-driven a new car? Maybe he has bought a new mobile phone. Perhaps it is because it's Friday. It turns out that it is none of the above. In fact, he tells me, as he comes bounding through the door laden with flowers, he's had a bonus!

Yes, that's right. Oodles of lovely money. 'So tomorrow, my sweet, we're having a night out,' he bellows as he throws his PalmPilot onto the new leather sofa and takes off his tie. Oh goody. It does mean I will have to miss that programme about the search for a new Joseph in the West End but I'm not saying no to a night out with Basil. I might even treat myself to a new outfit. The next night, we set off, strolling through St Helier. 'So,' I say, feeling all hip behind my new designer sunglasses. 'Where have you booked, Basil?'

'I haven't' he replies with a grin. 'There'll be somewhere my lovely, don't panic.'

I can't help but feel a little deflated. After all, I was promised a relaxing evening out and now it looks as if he expects me to go from door to door begging for a table. How demeaning. I soon learn what culinary rejection feels like. Everywhere we go in Kensington Place, tables are heaving with happy, relaxed diners who had the good sense to book ahead. We are greeted with sympathetic shakes of the head when we ask for a table for two. There had better be somewhere soon. My blood sugar levels are getting unstable.

Just as I'm about to give Basil what for, he stops outside a little place which looks all warm and inviting, pleasantly busy but not jam-packed. But will they have room for a couple taking a chance on a meal out? 'Casa Velha,' he says. I peer in. It looks busy, but thank God, as luck would have it, they not only have a table for two but also a bar. I plump for a glass of white wine but am offered a whole bottle to go with my meal. Basil opts for a bottle of red, and I take the time to look round. I can't place what it feels like, but then it hits me. The décor is like eating in a mini castle, yet not in an unpleasant way. From my soft leather sofa I see rich red curtains and warm lights softening the grey walls which look like fake stone slabs. It's all very nice, and the wine is going down well. Is that my third top up?

It's time to choose what to eat. I start with warm goat's cheese with tangy tomato hiding underneath and Basil opts for what he tells me are 'sardines done to perfection.' Well, I don't know about that. After all, I don't eat anything with a face. But as far as sardines go, they look friendly enough, even if they are dead. He has them plain, beautifully presented on glinting white plates. In fact, it is all very fresh and zesty. My goat's cheese is so good that it isn't long before Basil's fork appears twirling over my plate. I bat it away.



The Casa Velha was warm, inviting and pleasantly busy

Friendly and zesty

This is too good to share, and we're both making short work of the bread basket. I'm starting to feel full. Good job I wore the adjustable Diane Von Furstenburg wrap dress. It was expensive but luckily the relaxing evening is helping me knock the price tag in half in my mind.

Not being in the mood for a serious main course, I am pleased to be able to opt for yummy, creamy penne pasta. Basil, meanwhile, continues on his mission to rid the ocean of any fish that might still be left with his choice of a mixed fish platter. The conversation dies as he gets to grips with his meal, and for five minutes all I hear is a contented muffled sound of slurping and gnashing as he drinks his wine and clears his plate. Meanwhile I am in calorie heaven, savouring the taste of rich cream and savoury slivers of bacon. 'Like a pig with truffles,' Basil comments as I dig my fork in. I frown. I think he must be drunk. But I don't care. He's paying.

Casa Velha

opposite Parade Park

- Ambience ★★★★★
- Staff ★★★★★
- Menu ★★★★★
- Food ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall rating ★★★

Guess who's coming to dinner...

The executive chef at the Royal Yacht, Fred Tobin, tells us who he would invite to dinner and why

Thomas Keller: Widely regarded as one of America's finest chefs, Thomas Keller is the owner of

