

BANK HOUSE, CHISLEHURST

NESTED IN THE PRETTY SOUTH EAST LONDON BOROUGH OF CHISLEHURST, BANK HOUSE IS THE INGENIOUS CREATION OF STUART GILLIES AND WIFE CECILIA. FORMER CEO OF THE GORDAN RAMSAY GROUP, STUART, ALONGSIDE THE TEAM AND EXPERIENCED EX-KENTISH HARE HEAD CHEF BOBBY BROWN, BRING A WHOLE NEW STYLE OF RESTAURANT CONCEPT TO THE AREA, ONE THAT IS EXCITING, THRILLING AND SIGNIFICANTLY LOCAL – A RESTAURANT BUILT ON YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AND PASSION. **BY ASHLEIGH BRITTEN**



Taking our seats near to the back of the restaurant, immediately this place felt special, the mad rush to change into heels, may have been a little unnecessary, this place was super cool – sneakers or heels, you're fitting in here. And, despite preconceived thoughts, I was pleasantly surprised to find this former Natwest bank has been transformed into an unpretentious, inviting and warm neighbourhood gem, apparent from the moment you step over the threshold and are welcomed with open arms.

Traditional, untouched elements point to the building's Victorian history, beautifully complemented with contemporary additions, an uber fashionable herringbone floor, tactile finishings and masses of reflective surfaces – mirrors, glasses and a stand-out copper bar top, give it an industrial-come-chic look; it is stunning! And you can't help but notice the artwork, which we soon learnt is by local artists. Not only is Bank House offering the ultimate gallery showcase to local artists, students, and recent graduates; (yet another way that Stuart is supporting local and supporting youth progression, further evidenced by his commitment to employing young, local staff to build their experience and life skills); what's more exciting is they host artist talks, a base for artists to come and present and talk about their work – I mean is there anything they don't do here?

In keeping with the decor, comes the service, the perfect balance of friendly and professional, unobtrusive, yet attentive – the team know what they're doing and they're clearly passionate about it too!

A hand-crafted wine list is reflective of Stuart's experience and commitment to high quality, boasting a vast selection of amazing wines all of which have

been carefully selected, and many of which are produced in the UK. We started with a sparkly, Kingscote Rosé Brut 2019 from Sussex – an elegant blend of Bacchus, Pinot Meunier, Chardonnay, and Regent grapes. It had a gorgeous blush colouring, was fresh, subtle and dangerously drinkable.

Quite soon after, we received our first plates, an array of dishes for dipping and spreading – my idea of heaven. The talked-about padron peppers were on the list for a must try, served with a generous covering of Maldon salt, these small succulent delights were delicious. Alongside, a helping of chorizo drizzled with honey and a delightful looking pea and broad bean hummus, topped with barrel aged feta – subtle hints of pea with the cheese cutting through, it took hummus to a whole new level.

And then came the showstoppers; grilled English Fenn asparagus (locally-sourced) with a generous coating of wild garlic mayo, paired with a glass of Guy Allion Sauvignon de Touraine, this is a must!; a deconstructed Niçoise salad, beautifully delicate seared yellowfin tuna, served with potato, black olives, green beans, capers and egg – a colour explosion, and the sort of dish you can't get enough of; and then, there's the buttermilk chicken, crispy delightful tempura battered, smothered in barbecue sauce, with a blue cheese and spring onion dip – think deep fried chicken taken to a whole new level – sweet, sour and just delicious.

The most talked about dish was the Kentish rump of lamb served pink with baba ganoush and confit aubergine, it was easy to see why it was Cecilia's recommendation – melt in the mouth and even better washed down with a glass of Argentinian Malbec. I mean, give me a plate of that aubergine and I'd be happy! Next, was the most meltingly

tender octopus I've eaten, admittedly, quite a daring menu choice, but it is executed to perfection. Served with black pudding, white bean puree and saffron it's an almost twist on a Portuguese octopus and bean stew, and it was understandable why it has proven popular among the returning diners who were desperate to reacquire themselves with Bank House's tapas-style dining.

Bursting at the seams, we finish with a selection of probably not needed healthy sized puds, but it'd be rude not to! My top pick, the doughnuts. Served warm, dusted in cinnamon sugar, oozing with caramel, and complete with a generous helping of vanilla custard to dunk them in – yes they taste as good as they sound! The table also devoured a delicious sharp and smooth lemon posset, a rhubarb Bakewell tart with clotted cream, and an inspired flourless chocolate cake – all in the name of research of course!

Great interior, great food, intelligent wine list, and effortless friendly service – Bank House has it all, it's local, it's approachable, and it's definitely one that I will be going back to very very soon. So many come and go, this one however, is here to stay.

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