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Redcliffe chef Chris McSevney



**I**T'S not every day you enter a hotel doing an impression of Frank Spencer.

We may not have worn his trademark beret, but my daughter and I made plenty "ooh, woah and eek" noises as we gingerly wobbled and skidded towards the hotel's entrance.

Being as accident prone as Mr Spencer, our arrival was nothing short of comedic as the car park, which had been cleared of snow, had turned into a mini ice rink.

I dread to think what the diners watching from the conservatory thought, but thankfully they didn't reach for their mobiles to film us.

At least I hope they didn't. While the mercury plummeted outside, inside the welcome was warm and friendly.

We immediately got an apology for the car park, had our coats taken and hung in a warm spot and were politely ushered into the restaurant – a contemporary, but cosy, lounge with a stylish bar at one end and a large conservatory at the other.

We ate in the warm conservatory, which offered nice, if limited, views across the city, including the castle, which is just a couple of minutes' walk away.

Although it has been a hotel for only 50 years, the building at 1 Gordon Terrace has a long history of providing lodgings for visiting merchants and professionals – the most famous reputedly being Thomas Telford, the renowned Scottish civil engineer, who stayed in the house while overseeing the construction of the nearby Caledonian Canal. The hotel retains an air of the "hidden gem" about it as it's in the peaceful Crown residential district of the city. At lunchtime, there is a choice of menus, ranging from a popular-choice one to a la carte, and a flier offering any two courses for £7.95 or three for £10.50.

We opted for the flier after being impressed by its choice of dishes, which were different to the sometimes bland fare found on fixed-price deals. Starters included lentil soup with a freshly baked roll; leek and Parmesan risotto finished

## Hidden gem

with creme fraiche; curried mussel broth, and ham-hock terrine with home-made piccalilli and melba toast.

The mussel broth sounded intriguing and, as our friendly waitress recommended it, I plumped for it, while my daughter, who adores pickled flavours and what she calls proper ham, signed up for the terrine.

Service was super-efficient, prompt without being rushed, but slow enough to let you know someone was taking time to ensure that the presentation was spot on. My broth, served in a warm bowl (another nice touch) was the equivalent of sunshine on a plate.

It was made with a mixture of

shelled and unshelled fat, juicy muscles, potatoes and sweet peppers swimming in a bright yellow sauce which had a delicate curry flavour with hints of saffron and sage.

One of the more unusual broths I've eaten, it was packed with flavour and absolutely delicious.

My daughter's ham-hock terrine also went down a storm. A generous portion, the terrine had lovely slivers of sweet, smoky ham, which went beautifully with a zingy piccalilli made with chunky, crisp vegetables.

The choice of main dishes was equally impressive: celeriac lasagne and garlic bread; slow-roast pork belly with clapshot and roast potatoes; char-grilled



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chicken breast with stir-fry noodles and Thai coconut broth, and Toulouse sausage, beef and lamb-shoulder casserole topped with sliced new potatoes.

Having had a taste of my broth starter, she who likes parting me and my money opted for the chicken and Thai broth, while I couldn't resist tucking into a warming winter casserole.

My casserole was served in an individual, piping hot deep-sided dish and looked lovely, although I'm not a fan of these types of dishes as they can be

tricky to eat out of. All the meats were beautifully tender, while the French sausage, with its hint of garlic, gave the gravy an extra special kick.

Across the table, I could tell that the chicken wasn't going down as well as expected. The stir-fry noodles were perfectly cooked and the Thai coconut broth was deliciously pungent, but the chicken lacked punch by comparison, according to wannabe Delia, who suggested it might have had more impact had it been marinated in the sauce.

However, the menu did say



char-grilled chicken and, as such, it was perfectly cooked and juicy.

Although we shouldn't have, we succumbed to ordering a sweet.

It was the sticky-toffee pudding with butterscotch sauce for me and the second terrine of the day for my daughter, this time a chocolate and mint version with amaretti biscuits.

Like all the dishes, these were stylishly presented. My toffee pud was light and fluffy and tasted nicely of sweet dates. Served with a light butterscotch sauce, raspberry jus and rich ice cream, it could not be faulted. The dark chocolate terrine had a fantastically glossy topping and was extremely rich and buttery, with a texture that was firm on the plate but immediately melted in the mouth. The accompanying cream and amaretti biscuits, with their sweet almond flavour, made for an interesting and delicious contrast.



With two soft drinks and two glasses of house wine, our bill came to just £30.70. This was our first visit, but it won't be the last – although I think we may wait until the ice has melted.

■ The Redcliffe Hotel, 1 Gordon Terrace, Inverness. Phone 01463 232767.

QUALITY OF FOOD	4
MENU CHOICE	5
SURROUNDINGS	4
LOCATION	4
SERVICE	5
VALUE FOR MONEY	5
TOTAL [OUT OF 30]	27



Photographs: David Whittaker-Smith