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LEISURE

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Sixtyone's first year bodes well for future of restaurant

ADRIAN SEAL eats at Sixtyone, 61 Upper Berkeley Street, W1H 7PP. Tel 020 7958 3222. See www.sixtyonerestaurant.co.uk

IT'S been quite a year for chef patron Arnaud Stevens since his eagerly anticipated debut at Sixtyone, which is described as a 'neighbourhood restaurant' and is slightly hidden away in an area of Marylebone just north of the hustle and bustle of Oxford Street.

Twelve months since opening the restaurant's door, Arnaud, formerly executive head chef at the Gherkin, appears to have truly grasped the opportunity to go it alone.

In partnership with his protégé head chef Killian Lynch, Sixtyone celebrated receiving 3 AA rosettes in September and has received plenty of plaudits for its menu which is full of big bold flavours, inspired by old world French cooking using the best of British seasonal ingredients.

Sixtyone is actually part of the Montcalm Hotel, although it has its own smart designated restaurant entrance in Upper Berkeley Street, and you can quite easily enter and leave without ever knowing that you are actually in a hotel. It was certainly a welcome sight and a quiet oasis on my recent visit as I battled to get away from the madness of nearby Marble Arch and Oxford Street, thronged with late night Christmas

shoppers.

The calm and tranquillity continued inside the spacious restaurant, which has well positioned tables and comfortable stylish chairs and banquettes. The main feature of the interior design is some eye catching lighting, noticeably a large set of tubular copper lights that hang above the tables. Good use of large mirrors and other attractive opulent lighting, along with the use of copper, peach and cream in the colour scheme, help make for a very relaxed feel to the dining experience.

The menu is compact and highly imaginative and sensibly does not try to confuse the dinner with too many choices – there are six starters and mains and five desserts – and at first sight promises an exciting culinary experience at reasonably competitive prices.

Things got off to a good start as we tucked into a selection of moreish fresh rustic breads, which included a Marmite bread, attractively presented in a basket and served with their own delicious butter. As we perused the menu we actually had to take stock of ourselves and hold back on eating all the yummy breads.

Fiona started with the octopus carpaccio (£10), which came in the form of a colourful and inviting plate of fresh and flavoursome

thinly sliced octopus with a slightly sweet red pepper confit and smatterings of sorrel and sesame, leaves and pine nuts. It looked fantastic and also delivered on taste with all the components sitting comfortably together on the plate.

Keeping on the fish theme, my stylishly presented steamed mackerel with saffron pickles and cardamom yoghurt (£9) was a fresh and vibrant dish. The soft textures of the well cooked and flavoured fish sat well with crunchy pickled beets and cauliflower and was complimented by the dressing.

The high quality of the cooking coming out of the kitchen continued with my main of tender and flavoursome braised beef shoulder (£24) which came with a polished onion emulsion and some interesting sea vegetables, which all made for a pleasant and well seasoned dish.

Fiona looked a bit unsure at first with her gleaming white confit cod (£24) on a bed of sliced potatoes, but after several mouthfuls declared the well cooked fish sat in harmony on the plate with chorizo croquettes and cooked-to-perfection aubergine, which was a real triumph in terms of adding value to the dish.

We had sides of kale and crushed potatoes, both

£3.95, with our dishes.

I still found room for a tantalising pud of indulgent chocolate tart with gold marshmallow cubes, a creamy and divine salt caramel and chocolate shavings (£7) which, like everything else, was imaginatively executed and presented on the plate.

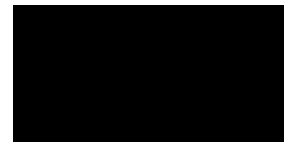
Fiona enjoyed a selection of five well presented aged artisan cheeses (£12), although was disappointed with the jam served with it.

The knowledgeable and affable sommelier paired an interesting and well matched selection of wines to each of our various dishes, and along with impeccable service from the excellent and cheerful staff it all made for an wholly enjoyable evening at Sixtyone – which can look forward to its second year with confidence and even greater recognition in culinary circles for Arnaud and his talented team.

I hope the endearing couple we sat next to from Welwyn Garden City, and with whom we struck up an interesting conversation during the course of the evening, enjoyed the rest of their meal – they were certainly well on the way to being Sixtyone converts by the time we left.



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