

TOP CLASS DINING

The boys were out, we'd both been working all day and there was nothing organised for our evening meal. What to do? Why not go out to dinner? We didn't want to go too far in case the boys decided to come home from their friends' house early, so headed the couple of miles into Nairn to the Classroom.

We were warmly welcomed by restaurant manager Heather. As it was a very rare quiet night in the Classroom we had a choice of tables, so headed for one beside the window. With a view down Nairn's High Street, we could watch the world go by.

We've both known Heather for longer than any of us would care to remember – she has worked in bars for many years and was even the boys' playgroup teacher – but she's found her niche at the Classroom.

Yes, we know her, but her welcome and service was no less warm and friendly for other diners than it had been for us.

The décor in the Classroom is simple – lots of honey coloured wood and with all those

windows, it's very light. There are tables outside which are lovely to sit at in the summer.

Zoe came over and took our drinks order. I've been out to dinner with my hubby too many times before so dived in with a request for a large glass of house red and told him he could have water before he could say "I'll have a pint".

The house red is very nice, but for those of you who like something else, the Classroom's wine menu – which is excellent – has other wines available by the glass.

We perused the menu, which changes every six weeks or so, as well as the specials board, while tucking in to some delicious bread.

Some restaurants make a big deal about using local food then when you look at the menu you wonder what's local, but farmer and owner of the Classroom, Willie Lean, makes the most of Nairnshire produce at every opportunity. Chicken comes from his own farm, pork and beef come from others just a couple of miles away.

Hubby chose red pepper and tomato soup from the specials board to start. An excellent choice.

I swithered – would I choose this, too? It's a favourite of both of ours, but I decided to be adventurous and choose something I normally wouldn't – the five spice shredded duck breast, tossed with raspberry vinaigrette and toasted pine nuts with tomato and chilli jam.

I should say now that duck is something I usually avoid but it just called out to me and I'm so glad that it did. The spices are very subtle, just adding a touch of flavour,



League table

Restaurant	Marks out of 50
Crannog, Fort William	47
The Shore, Kirkwall	46
Old Mill Inn, Brodie	43
Mackays Hotel, Wick	43
La Tortilla Asesina	43
The Snowgoose	42
Hard Rock Café, Edinburgh	30

Please note, the restaurant review only began marking out of 50 in the April 2010 edition. Restaurants are in Inverness unless otherwise stated.

The Classroom

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Marks out of 10

Menu selection	9
Food	10
Ambience	9
Service	9
Value for money	10

Summary: Superb food in a relaxed setting. Excellent service and prices (pennies over £25 per head for three courses, excluding drinks). What more could you ask for?

then you're whacked in the mouth by the sweet, sticky chilli jam. Add a crunch from the pine nuts, a drop of salad leaves, and you couldn't ask for more.

My main of pan fried fillet of trout with pineapple and chilli salsa, new potatoes and salad came from the specials board.

The fish was perfectly cooked, the pineapple balancing the slight oiliness of the trout, then a kick from the chilli. Lovely big new potatoes and a delicious salad of mixed leaves, croutons and olives with a lovely dressing rounded off the dish nicely.

Hubby's seared venison steak with duck and queen scallops, rosti potato, fine beans and a soy, lime and coriander jus was equally delightful, the meat cooked perfectly to medium/rare.

We were getting full and the timid among you would probably give up at this point and ask for a coffee and the bill.

But we don't get many opportunities to spend a couple of hours together without interruptions from children, work, etc, so were making the most of it. (Yes, I know I

was working really and the phone was on in case the boys needed us, but snatched time together is snatched time together.)

And I was on my second glass of wine so feeling reckless! So we asked for the dessert menu.

The white chocolate and raspberry cheesecake on the specials board was calling out to me, but so were most of the items on the main dessert menu.

This was one of the hardest decisions I had to make all evening...

Sticky toffee pudding with toffee sauce and vanilla ice cream won in the end.

A huge scoop of sticky toffee pudding comes with an equally huge scoop of smooth ice cream. The pudding is moist and delicious, the toffee sauce brings the dark and light, hot and cold, together in a match made in heaven.

My other half usually goes for the cheese board when he's having dessert so I was surprised when he announced he was having the caramel sundae (the bubbles in the water must have gone to his head!).

