

29th January 2009

## Martha & Vincent, The Grove, Ilkley



**Amazing food:  
Martha & Vincent**

JUST approaching gives you a warm glow. In the distance, at the end of a tree-lined street of Victorian stone shops and houses, lies this unassuming frontage with a black sign, the words Martha & Vincent hand-painted in gold.

Inside is the flickering light of candles on tables and the muted bustle of chatting diners. It's early Friday night and the place is already half full.

Once through the door we're greeted by a decor of dark browns, greys and blacks which should appear stark and monochrome but is strangely warming. It's pretty compact, the odd mirror here and there trying to make the most of the space, but it only adds to the cosy, stylish feel.

We were greeted by friendly staff who took our coats and saw us to our table immediately.

And from thereon in the service was astonishingly fast and slick. We didn't feel rushed but we certainly weren't conscious of waiting for anything other than the bill – as busy as they were they were in no hurry to get us out and get their hands on our table.

The menu here is instantly reassuring since it isn't overloaded with options – an indication of a quality product, made with fresh ingredients.

And the combinations in the dishes are delightful. My dining partner went for the starter of roasted quail with bubble and squeak, which was perfection, while I went for the pan-fried scallops with lobster tortellini, which was absolutely celestial.

Things only got better with the mains. I had the corn-fed duck breast with savoy cabbage, pomme fondant and redcurrant jus, which must have been the best duck I've ever tasted, not terribly fatty and cooked just right. My dining partner was just as happy with her sea bass with braised fennel and shellfish ragout.

Just when we thought it couldn't get any better came the desserts, mine was the three flavoured panacottas which were surprisingly glutinous, but still sublimely tasty, even more mouthwatering was my dining partner's cherry and almond tart which was a crumbly, sticky slice of heaven.

**Quite simply it was some of the best food we'd ever tasted and all beautifully presented in little parcels, drizzled judiciously with dressings and sauces. It looked incredible and tasted just as good.**

All of which was accompanied by a fantastic bottle of shiraz cabernet which was a relative bargain at £15.50.

In general, the only downside to Martha & Vincent is the price. It's expensive. Most starters are priced between £5 and £7, the mains anywhere from £16 to £21 and desserts about £6.50 each.

Not surprisingly our three-course meal with a bottle of wine, coffees and a tip came to almost £100. But it's no exaggeration to say it's worth a three-figure price tag.

You feel you've paid a luxurious price for something which is genuinely luxurious.

It's obvious that there has been a concerted effort to create a fine dining experience at Martha & Vincent and they have, partially at least, succeeded.

The aim is to cater for the local clientele in this rather upmarket spa town. It's a clientele which has money, expensive taste and a penchant for understated style. Ilkley has no desire to be Harrogate or Leeds or York, it remains a little oasis of smart simplicity.

So M&V have created a fine dining experience to match. The food isn't irritatingly fiddly and experimental. Sure, there's some imagination invested in the dishes but nothing that makes you roll your eyes at the self-indulgence of it all.

The ambience lacks too much stuffiness and those high prices aren't nearly as high as many a high class restaurant where you'll struggle to find food this superior.

Besides, the price tag seems to fit in with the whole ambience of the place, which is one of a traditional top-level restaurant – waiters in white shirts and aprons, the flickering candles, the gently humming, slightly muted atmosphere.

Dripping contemporary sophistication, it's the sort of place you dress up to visit. It's a treat, not just a means to eat. Want to dine on a budget? Go elsewhere.

**But if you want amazing food, an unforgettable night and great service nowhere does it better than Martha & Vincent.**

**Martha & Vincent, 39 The Grove, Ilkley**

**Tel. 01943 602444**

**Website: [www.marthaandvincent.co.uk](http://www.marthaandvincent.co.uk)**

<b>FOOD</b>	<b>5/5</b>
<b>VALUE</b>	<b>3/5</b>
<b>ATMOSPHERE</b>	<b>5/5</b>
<b>SERVICE</b>	<b>5/5</b>