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By **Oliver**



**H**e's always promoted his restaurant as a home for "fine dining without the fuss", which is understandable given Tom van Zeller's grounding.

The chef has spent much of his career working in kitchens owned by everyone from Damien Hirst and Terence Conran to the legendary Raymond Blanc and Tom Aikens, but he's also a local lad, Harrogate born and bred.

Whether or not the no-nonsense Yorkshireman approach has genuinely diminished the fussiness is debatable because Van Zeller is the place to come if you like your food adorned by delectable purées, reductions and foams. But it's the finest of dining, be in no doubt.

On arrival we were greeted by French maitre d' Patrice, shown to a table clad in a crisp

**"it's the finest of dining, be in no doubt"**

white cloth and immediately served a delightful amuse-bouche in the form of a shot glass of chilled pumpkin and ginger soup.

The food selection is divided up into the regular menu – which includes lobster or snails for starter, or mains which such as grouse or Cote de Boeuf – or the six-course taster menu comprising the likes of cod with vegetables and squid ink purée.

But there is a third option in the form of a set menu which is no less interesting in terms of cuisine but very alluring in terms of value – it comes in at £20 for three courses.

My dining partner went for the cream of celeriac soup with peas and samphire, which resulted in him practically closing his eyes and purring. And, yes, it was that good. I tried it and purred in harmony.

Equally impressive was his main of Panko breaded plaice fillets which were incredibly light and cooked so that they were the perfect midpoint of moist and dry. They were served with spring greens pea purée and Noilly Prat velouté, and the whole dish was beyond criticism.

Interestingly, both my dining partner's options were equally fantastic but since they came from the set menu, came to a total of just £15.

None of that budget nonsense for me though, my own main was the Yorkshire lamb, the meat was like slices of warm velvet and the accompanying kidney was delectable. It came with a potato wafer and globules of aubergine purée and jus rôti.

The service was great, Patrice was particularly friendly and all the food came at lightning speed. Sometimes, if you're lucky, Tom will personally bring the food to your table.

Which heightens the sense that this is very much his place.

Everything about this restaurant is Van Zeller – it's high class but maintains a rela-

tively modest profile, it draws on the best elements of international gastronomy but utilises local produce and, like Tom himself, is very Harrogate but could probably be a success anywhere in the world.



**FactFile**

Van Zeller, 8 Montpellier Street, Harrogate, HG1 2TQ  
Telephone: 01423 508 762  
www.vanzellerrestaurants.co.uk

Opening hours:  
**Lunch:** Tuesday to Saturday, noon to 2pm  
**Sunday lunch:** noon to 4pm  
**Dinner:** Tues to Sat 6pm to 10pm

**Star rating:**  
Food ★★★★★  
Value ★★★★  
Atmosphere ★★★★★  
Service ★★★★★

Excellent ★★★★★ Average ★★  
Very good ★★★★★ Poor ★  
Good ★★★