

Just the place 'for a nice piece of fish'

BRIAN BERKMAN

RECENTLY I resolved to be grumpy to anyone thinner than I am, so you can imagine the pleasure of those around me when I arrived at Ben's on the Beach restaurant on the Strand. Even if the food was less than excellent I would have been charming to the end.

Ben prepares meals with diners like himself in mind. I recall him saying he didn't mind people sending food back half eaten, as long as they didn't leave hungry which I can assure you, they won't.

So out of a choice of three pre-ordained dishes, I selected the gazpacho (R22) to start, Lamb Rogan Josh (R72) and missed dessert (R23). On the second occasion, a week later, I started with the crumbed and deep fried haloumi (R25) (I'll comment on my diet later) and roasted line fish (R57) as the main. Again I managed to avoid dessert. As is evident from the proprietor, low-fat is not a culinary focus at Ben's and my choices, while certainly not Weigh-Less approved, were the best of the bunch.

Ben's on the Beach is relatively new, with him hailing from the Bobby Mcgees in Somerset West and prior to that, the Uncle Ben's in Stellenbosch. The interior is unexpectedly pleasing, as it has reds and blues, that in my imagination look awful, and yet in reality work nicely. Especially appealing is a series of metal, glass and light sculptures that adorn the walls. I wouldn't be surprised if Tuscany Beach in Camps Bay and Ben's share the same interior designer.

Although it is on Strand's Beach Road with nothing but the wind separating it from the sea, the restaurant



APPEALING: The interior of Ben's on the Beach is unexpectedly pleasing.

Picture: Gary van Wyk

didn't strike me as being designed to take full advantage of the sea views.

The gazpacho was delicious and I noticed that many in the group who had not had gazpacho before were excited by the piquant fieriness in a chilled soup. The flavours were intense and delicious. The Lamb Shank didn't taste like Rogan Josh to

me, but was, none the less, beautifully tender and warmly spicy in a rich coconut cream. There were two shanks per portion.

I had thought, in the interests of symmetry, that I should eat four legs instead of two but the truth is I regretted the gluttony as I suffered from indigestion for the remainder of that day

and night. I wish, rather than like a small child, I would learn from my mistakes...

My choice of the haloumi (served on rocket with a sweet chilli jam) was again the most healthful as I didn't expect to find it deep fried.

The other option, mussels in cream, garlic and blue cheese

screamed calories although looked delicious. I haven't really understood the recent popularity of haloumi here – and when I must eat it I prefer it grilled.

The line fish – served with potato of the day (either savoury mash, potato cream bake or diced sauté potato) was perfectly cooked. A lot of people ask me where they should go for a "nice piece of fish" and now I can happily recommend Ben's.

Although I couldn't make out the prawn in the prawn and chive butter, it was a delicious piece of yellow tail and perfectly well cooked.

I relished the experience of watching people eat Crème Brulee for the first time.

Despite my explanation of it as thick custard with a crispy sugar topping, the happy surprise of them eating it was rewarding enough. The other dessert, Semifredo (directly translated as half cold) was described by the excellent waitress as a combination of ice-cream and white chocolate-mousse.

That didn't seem to go down as well as the more accessible ice cream with toffee sauce.

The first group had 12 diners and the second over 30 and while I acknowledge the kitchen didn't have to contend with a la carte orders from a full restaurant, I am sufficiently impressed with the quality and service to recommend Ben's on the Beach unreservedly.

● *Ben's on the Beach – 142 Beach Road, Strand, 021 853 7977. Open Monday to Saturday from 5.30pm and Sunday from 11.30am. This review was unannounced and paid for.*

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