



Wednesday dining out with Martin Dawes

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Good food, great value - and I mean that most sinCereely folks

WE arrive at the door of the little Cafe Ceres on bistro night at the same time as the owner and head chef, Jean-Paul Strappazon, carrying a bunch of bananas.

The menu hasn't changed much since our last visit, we smiled, and, sure enough, The Dish They Can't take Off, crepes with flambéed bananas, is on the blackboard.

There are a lot more of those dishes at Ceres, on Sharrowvale Road, Sheffield, opposite the school, such as bourginonne and steak with a pepper sauce.

Not all the best cooking is at flash or fancy places, nor does it have to be expensive.

Take Ceres, a French-influenced cafe by day which, on Fridays and Saturdays, turns into a little bistro.

It's a proper bistro with a menu full of classics but don't start to yawn. Jean-Paul is a relaxed cook and a good one.

You won't find your plate full of competing flavours but just a couple doing their job admirably.

Add to this that you can bring your own wine and end up with a bill for two for three courses at a shade over £30 and then you don't mind that the loo is at the bottom of the garden.



Top value: Caroline and Jean-Paul Strappazon turn the Cafe Ceres into a proper bistro on Fridays and Saturdays and do it very well

Pictures: Barry Richardson

'You could pay twice as much and not have better'

Jean-Paul, you might have guessed, is French, from near Chamoniex, where they ski, and he took over the place with his English wife Caroline some eight years ago.

His first impressions of Sheffield might have been coloured by the fact that he had never lived in a town before, let alone a city, but he's got to like us - and speak English.

"But I can't get used to the weather," he says.

His cooking spoke for him first and those in the know soon appreciated his pastrywork - he was a pastry chef before Ceres - and the delights of his French onion tart.

The cafe has just eight tables, four up and four down an extremely steep flight of stairs, the reason everyone who works there is slim.

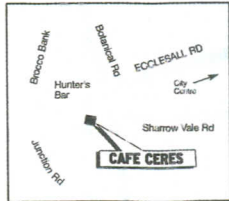
The downstairs room seems to have been done out forever in red and yellow with a couple of blackboards. It's a bit bright

FOOD REVIEW



CAFE CERES

■ 390 Sharrowvale Road, Hunters Bar, Sheffield.
■ Tel: 0114 267 9090.
■ Bistro menu Fri and Sat 4.30-7.30pm. BYO £1.50 corkage. Gentle music. Credit cards. Outside toilet. Street parking.



■ Cafe Ceres is closed until April 7.

■ My star ratings (out of five):

Food ★★★★★
Atmosphere ★★★
Service ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★

Bistro category. Do not compare ratings between places of different style or price.

and I suspect if Caroline had not been at home minding the couple's two children she would have dimmed the lights and put some candles on the tables.

But there's enough atmosphere. Our dining companions in the small room

include a young couple wrapped up in each other and a middle aged couple wrapped up in their newspapers over a pot of tea.

Cafe Ceres doesn't really do starters unless you opt for a half portion of salad or soup.



A cafe by day: Customers enjoy a coffee at Cafe Ceres

We do. The onion soup (£2.75) is intensely flavoured with a sweet edge and a couple of cheesy croutons while my wife's pan-fried goats cheese salad (£3.50) comes with half a roundel fried beautifully crisp and melting hot inside.

"Mmmm, by far the best I've had," she said.

Jean-Paul's version of duck a l'orange (£8.50) is a precisely cooked segmented breast (more a 32A than a 36C) with a reduced orange juice jus and a side dish of garlicky

dauphinoise potatoes, which just makes the dish.

And I don't know how the French get their green beans to taste the way they do.

My wife's salmon (£6.90) is a decent-sized moist and full-flavoured fillet with a sauce of creamed leeks - very bistro.

So are the rest of the mains: thyme flavoured roast chicken, mushroom risotto, onion tart and, of course, peppered steak.

After a gap we investigate dessert. So does a table in the upper room. "We haven't got a blackboard upstairs," says a diner sent down to report back.

I've had the crepes before so settle for clafoutis, with plums instead of the classic cherries.

Think of fruit toad in the hole and you've got it. The batter is a trifle heavy but otherwise fine. A wine poached pear is simplicity itself and beautifully done. Both cost £2.75. The surroundings are not swish but you could pay twice as much and not have better.

With a couple of good espressos (£1.20 each) and corkage, we paid £31.05. A bargain.