

Standout fare comes with fine sea views



Denise Irvine
Stir it up

WE had a holiday at Raglan last week, and were on the lookout for a spot to eat one night. We've enjoyed several places in Raglan in the past, but this time a couple of locals recommended the waterfront's Orca, which we hadn't tried.

If you know Raglan, you'll remember this low-slung building at the end of the jetty. It's had many incarnations as an eatery; unless I'm mistaken, my memories of it go back to childhood holidays, and meals of fish and chips with white bread and butter on the side.

Orca may have another life ahead because I've recently seen it advertised for sale. But we certainly made the most of the current management's very good food and friendly service.

The restaurant is tastefully fitted out but they've kept it simple because you don't need a lot of embellishment when you've got sea views to enjoy. The spacious building also accommodates Orca's adjacent bar, and a dining deck facing the water.

We were pleasantly greeted and seated, then spent some time pondering the tasty menu which has a slightly European influence to it.

Bill loves globe artichokes and was taken by the artichoke and potato salad starter (\$16). I thought I'd share a few morsels of this, and save myself for my main. But the waitress warmly recommended the steak tartare (\$15). You don't often see this finely ground raw meat classic on menus, so I caved in immediately and ordered it.

Both dishes were a pleasure. The artichokes were especially flavoursome, perfect with the sliced potatoes, truffle mayonnaise, parmesan and green leaves. Similarly, I was really pleased I'd tried the steak tartare because it was a damn fine effort. Orca's version was served without the traditional raw egg. Instead it was well matched with rocket, parmesan and toasted ciabatta, the peppery rocket cutting the richness of the meat very well.

Main choices included seafood options of fish and chips (a nice touch) and oven-roasted warehou, as well as pork belly, lamb rack, duck breast, scotch fillet and braised beef cheek.

I had the warehou (\$28), served on fennel puree and shaved fennel salad and cherry tomato salad. The fish was chunky and moist, and I liked the double hit of fennel with its contrasting textures and delicate flavours. Bill's excellent pink roasted lamb rack (\$26) came with a wedge of baked potatoes, aubergine puree and tomatoes, and both dishes were served with a generous side of glazed fresh asparagus.

Everything was smartly presented, our waitress was charming, there was an interesting choice of New Zealand wines available, and we couldn't help but share a fine vanilla bean brulee with homemade biscotti before we wandered back to our holiday rental.

We returned a couple of days later for a sunny breakfast on the deck, and another good result.

>> THE WRAP:

What: Orca Restaurant and Bar, 2 Wallis St, Raglan, phone 07 825 6543. Open seven days for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Food: Contemporary, creative menu that makes the most of good ingredients.

Wine: Good selection of interesting New Zealand vinos, with some Aussie and European imports.

Service: Knowledgeable and friendly.

Bonus: Oh, I do like to be beside the seaside. (And the unexpected find of steak tartare.)