

La Margherita Southampton

Written by Emma Caulton



La Margherita, perched above the waters on Southampton's Town Quay, has become something of an institution over the years. It is a contemporary Italian bar and restaurant that opens from 11am for coffees, lunches and dinners before metamorphosing into a dance venue that's particularly lively on Friday and Saturday nights.

Sharon and I arrived earlyish on a Thursday evening to find customers already relaxing over a drink in the al fresco area and the conservatory-style entrance lounge with its low sofas and club chairs in shades of caramel and coffee. We wandered past the bar and across a dance floor into the dining area, and turned the corner to be astonished by a sudden view of boats and water filling the end wall. In a town with a busy port where there are surprisingly few restaurants with truly waterside positions and views, this is a delight.

We were led to a circular table right by the window and above the waters. The understated scheme of dark neutrals does not detract from that view... The restaurant is a glossy sea of dark wood, darker upholstered chairs and walls the colour of bark highlighted by wall lights of ribboned copper.

An even greater delight is that the food

ASTONISHED BY A SUDDEN VIEW OF BOATS AND WATER FILLING THE END WALL

lives up to the view. From a tempting choice of antipasti, Sharon had Funghi di Bosco Selvaggio – wild mushrooms in a traditional white wine, cream and garlic sauce on toasted ciabatta and prettily piled with rocket and curls of red pepper. I picked antipasto – a generous heap of sweet roasted peppers, Parma ham, salamis and mortadella, slices of Parmesan, skinny bread sticks and tasty marinated olives all impeccably presented on a thick wooden board.

From a wine list dominated by Italian wines, we both had glasses of a very guggable, fruity unoaked Chardonnay – perfect for Sharon's main course of rich, caramelised veal escalope flambéed in honeyed Marsala wine and served with mushrooms.

I had a dramatic bowlful of well-seasoned black pasta made intensely vibrant with contrasting roasted red pepper, rocket and parsley and sweet, just tinged gold, scallops. I couldn't have been happier – this is my sort of food.

We shared a tiramisu between us, homemade to a secret Florentine recipe,

light as marshmallow, subtly alcoholic and presented on a wavy plate Jackson Pollacked with splashes of chocolate and strawberry jus.

Tucked by the window, tables filled up behind us and there was a pleasant buzzy atmosphere; and as we headed back across that dance floor we were tempted to sashay to the Latin beats.

ESSENTIALS

What Lively contemporary Italian restaurant and bar serving well presented modern and classic Italian dishes

Where La Margherita, Town Quay, Southampton SO14 2AQ, 023 8033 3390

Service Handsome Italian chaps being effortlessly charming

What's the damage? Good value: antipasti from £4.65, mains from £7.60, desserts from £4.95