

Fine feast awaits at journey's end

tastetest

Thalia Thompson at
The Manorhaus, Ruthin

BUT why are you going all the way to Ruthin?" the babysitter asked. Fair question really, as it's a 40-mile round trip for us and there are plenty of places to eat closer to home.

But it was my husband's birthday and we were in the mood for something out of the ordinary. And that's what you get at Manorhaus, a boutique hotel that doubles as an art gallery and restaurant.

It's a Georgian Grade II listed building, and it makes a style statement with its strongly painted walls - chalk blue in the lounge, blood red in the bar and deep aubergine in the dining room - and its airy tented conservatory.

It's even got a private cinema and meeting room in the original medieval barrel vaulted basement.

We'd booked a table for 8.30pm and the place was busy when we arrived. We were left to read the menu in the bar for a good 20 minutes before our order was taken and it was 9pm before we were shown to our table.

At this point I was getting hungry and a bit impatient, but I was soothed by the sight of the beautifully laid table, all snowy white napkins and designer cutlery.

The basket of bread rolls flavoured with thyme, lemon, creme fraiche, orange and cumin helped too.

They're serious about food here and it shows in the well-thought out menu with a



choice between six options at each course. There's an emphasis on local ingredients with provenance clearly signed - dishes include Menai mussels with wild garlic, Welsh lamb and local cheeses.

Having spent the afternoon battling the weeds in our garden, I took my revenge by choosing wild nettle and spring onion risotto to start. This was outstanding, creamy yet with the fresh green taste of spring.

My husband's starter of braised rabbit papparadelle pasta with an oxtail consomme and chorizo was just as

impressive and full of big meaty flavours.

For the main course my husband had the mint crusted rack of Welsh spring lamb. The meat was meltingly tender and the accompanying vegetables were beautifully presented, with a stack of aubergine and potato slices sitting in a pool of smooth pea puree and topped with golden wafers of crisp haloumi cheese.

I had monkfish, speared kebab style on skewers made from stalks of rosemary. Used like this the herb, which can be over-powering, delicately perfumed the succulent chunks of fish.

The skewers were served on a bed of pak choi with a zingy red pepper couscous on the side.

I was too full for pudding but had coffee served with homemade petit fours. My

husband managed to make room for pistachio polenta cake, nubbly and delicious, served with almond ice cream and roast strawberries.

I knew I had the 20-mile drive home, so I stuck to the carafe of tap water thoughtfully provided on each table.

The birthday boy had a couple of glasses of wine from the choice of seven available by the glass. The wine list also includes a red dessert wine - quite unusual to find - and my husband had a glass with his pudding. It was delicious, with an

astonishing, heady scent of muscat grapes.

Manorhaus isn't a cheap night out but it's very fairly priced for the quality of the ingredients and standard of cooking. If you're lucky to live a bit closer than us, give it a try. And even if you don't, it's worth the drive.

the bill

3 course meal	£29.50
2 course meal	£23.50
glass rose	£3.50
glass shiraz	£4.20
glass black muscat	£5.95
coffee	£2.95
total	£69.60

the facts

open daily 6.30pm-9pm
parking nearby
disabled access steps between floors
service friendly and efficient
overall great for a special night out

•Manorhaus,
Well Street, Ruthin
(manorhaus.com,
01824 704830)