



Written by
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7 Jul 2018

The pleasures of Margate



A version of this article is published by the Financial Times.

Lee Coad had just finished taking the payment from a customer when he looked up and said, 'Have a nice afternoon, although looking at the sky, I'm not so sure what lies in store.'

The view from the window of his restaurant Angela's just off the seafront in Margate, Kent, was impressive. And it is one of the major reasons he and his partner, Charlotte Forsdike, settled here a couple of years ago and opened this, their first and probably their only restaurant.

The view is dominated by the wide sky, although on the afternoon we were there it was one that was completely filled with grey and rather heavy clouds. There was the view of the beach, of countless boats being brought into view by the rising tide, and off to the right the distinctive outline of the Turner Contemporary gallery.

In fact Coad's views today must be very similar to those that first attracted the painter JMW Turner to Margate in 1786. He kept returning to Margate thereafter for the love of its skies, the sea and his landlady, Mrs Booth, according to his champion John Ruskin.

Margate has changed profoundly since then and not all of these changes have been for the better. One of the major improvements has to be the high-speed train service that whisks you from St Pancras International to Margate, through Chatham, Rochester and Whitstable, in 90 minutes. And from the station, Margate's charms, most notably and unusually a large, sandy beach, are immediately evident to the visitor, despite the ugliness of a tall modern block off to the right.



A walk and a coffee were of primary concern so we set off down the hill to explore and to make our way round the harbour wall to Mala Kaffe, a small coffee shop where the lattes and cinnamon buns are excellent. And it was sitting outside in the wind that we both became aware of another of this seaside town's particular charms - its attractiveness to anyone with a large dog.

Then there was just time for a quick whizz around the Old Town of Margate, populated by shops selling vintage clothes and items on the cusp of junk and antiques, as well as a plethora of ice-cream parlours, including Ramsay & Williams that offers both ice cream and fifties memorabilia.

The town still recalls the early 1960s encounters between Mods and Rockers that brought Margate extensive notoriety in that era.

Walking back to Angela's took us past Peter's Fish Factory on the Parade, which had a large queue outside it, the obvious attraction being the offer on the blackboard of haddock and chips for the exceptionally low price of £3.95. The blackboard later revealed that they had, not surprisingly, sold out.

No more than a couple of hundred yards further along was Angela's, whose sign outside read, 'Sorry, we are fully booked - enjoy the seaside'. The small restaurant that seats 16 in its front dining room and only another 10 in the rear, with a seemingly very simple open kitchen in between, shares the same name as the rental accommodation above. Both were established by the original Angela in 1958 but today they are run independently.

And no sooner had we walked in than we were recognised - well, at least Jancis was. Lee Coad had been an art director with the *FT* for several years and recognised its long-standing wine correspondent.

His wine list, as well as another piece of paper with the drinks list on it, focuses on the local. Gins come from Wales and Chatham, wines from Norfolk, Kent and Sussex, and there is even seaweed tea and coffee from Haeckels and Curve, both based in Margate.

This very much coincides with the owners' priority for an ethically sourced and 'no waste' restaurant (the table tops are made from plastic bags recycled into something solid and swirly). The blackboard menu listing that service's six starters and main courses makes this clear. Mussels, cider and garlic; cured mackerel and kohlrabi; trout and fennel with a rock oyster sauce; and hake with cuttlefish and clams - all sounded appealing, and with only one main course of Dover sole with samphire more than £20, relatively inexpensive. (My bill came to £79 for two without service.)



I began with six enormous Whitstable oysters and Jancis with a dish of scallops and broad beans that were just slightly the wrong side of al dente. We then proceeded to two simple but outstanding main courses - a fillet of turbot served on the bone with the most delicious smoked paprika hollandaise and a starter portion of half a lobster with garlic and hazelnut butter, a richness that added considerably to the sweetness of the shellfish.



We followed these with a dessert that would probably have delighted Turner. Its description 'junket with strawberries' did not do justice to either the creaminess of the former or the macerated nature of the latter. When I congratulated Coad, he confessed to their particular penchant of finishing off any that remain in the fridge at the end of the service as their chef, Rob Cooper, makes them fresh each morning.

Judging from the smile on Coad's face, ruddy from the sun and the wind, as we said goodbye, I believe that at Angela's yet another individual has found his metier as a restaurateur.

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