



WINED & DINED

by Claire Smith of No.10 The Coffee House

December, and I'm just beginning to feel the sparkle - the almost tangible

excitement that hangs in the crisp winter air and upon bare branches gilded silver and white by early morning frosts; there is an air of anticipation as the festive season approaches. Wintertime - the deep slumber before Springtime nurturing secret life within the sleeping soil; brightly lit homes, open fires and candlelight that bring warmth and light into the darker months as we prepare for the oncoming of another year and celebrate the completion of another cycle.

December 21st brings Winter Solstice, the shortest day traditionally known as Yule, after which the hours of light lengthen a little with each passing day. Christmas

is a time to celebrate our safe passage through another year. The evergreen tree brought into the home at Christmas represents everlasting life; the mistletoe for kissing under, fertility of both body and mind; the candles that give a warm golden glow to our homes, the return of the sun.

It is not only twinkling lights and the cosiness of home that make the time of year so special. When December hits, my thoughts turn to hot roasted chestnuts, snuggly pre-Christmas suppers writing cards in front of the fire, tins harbouring cakes rich with fruit and brandy from which waft the heady

scent of Christmas when opened, and chocolate, rich, dark and tempting. Food is an essential ingredient when it comes to weaving love and magic into Christmas celebrations.

Certain foods seem almost to belong to Christmas; eating them out of context actually strips away some of their allure, diminishes their power. Mince pies fall into this category as does Christmas pud. Keeping them for Christmas endows them with the power to conjure memories and create atmospheres, their arrival announcing the making of a special kind of magic filled with the promise of the

season. Dropping silver coins into the pudding bestows both the making and eating of it with the potency of a magic spell.

If you are lucky enough to have an open fire on which to roast your chestnuts,

try burning resinous woods such as sandalwood, juniper or bay, which will not only add to the festive atmosphere, but will serve to lift the spirits and facilitate a sense of well being, as well as adding an air of sensuality to the occasion.

Adding a few drops of essential oil - cinnamon, sandalwood or frankincense for example - to candle wax whilst it is still molten will imbue the room with the wonderful scents of the season once the candle is re-lit. Christmas should be a feast for all the senses shared with those we love, which marks the blessings of the past year and looks forward to the next.



When it comes to Italian food I am always looking to be impressed. Savoring international dishes in my travels has exposed me to the abundant varieties of Italian cuisine, so I relished the opportunity to dine at Amici Restaurant in Keighley.

Arriving in the restaurant it was more spacious inside than viewed from the street. The décor is wall-to-ceiling white and quite well lit, which gives it a classic feel. Despite two large birthday groups creating a commotion, I was looked after very quickly. From arrival to getting



a drink at the bar, sitting down and ordering, it seemed to take a matter of minutes. Maybe the atmosphere seemed to make time fly. Amici's is a very lively and popular place on a weekend, buzzing with the hum of conversation and gaiety. Actually, it added to the authentic Italian experience. I would say that if you want a quiet, intimate meal you might be wiser to book midweek.

For starters I had Mozzarella Milanese; deep-fried mozzarella cheese served with a tomato Napolitano sauce and a small portion of salad. I love the texture of this dish: the crunchy coating and gooey interior of fried cheese. It's not the healthiest dish on the menu, but it works for me every time and this was exceptional as it was just the right-size portion leaving plenty of room for my main course. I've heard the pizzas are



quite special - they're baked in a wood-burning oven (I'll have to try one next time), but I opted for a pasta entree. The Penne Amici; strips of premium beef, rocket, cream, tomatoes, basil and chilli was a very tasty dish with a bit of a kick, something the chilli delivered without knocking me out.

I had enough space left to squeeze in a banoffee, an ice cream pudding that really finished me off. By this time the restaurant was slowly emptying out with satisfied-looking diners and, as I lingered over the dessert and slowly drained the last drops of wine (Montepulciano D'Abruzzo), I wondered how I happened to neglect this local gem for so long. When I paid my very affordable bill I was given a free shot of Sambuca, which was a nice touch, at the end of an excellent meal.

Amici means friends and I'll certainly recommend it to mine!



105-107 East Parade, Keighley
Tel: 01535 610699
www.amici.uk.com