

Hogan's Inn, a French inspired restaurant in the heart of King City

By Wendy Soloduik

My friends and I are foodies.

On weekends, we enjoy discovering new restaurants, always looking for that special place that could become our new favorite spot. We look for places that have a unique charm, something off the beaten path, and definitely not a 'franchised' experience. Perhaps it's the atmosphere, attention to detail, or informed bar tending that leads us towards a bistro-type establishment, but it's always a farm to table philosophy on food, and a reasonable price tag, that keeps us coming back for more.

On the advice of a friend, we decided to check out Hogan's Inn at Four Corners in King City.

Located at the intersection of Keele Street and King Road, the eatery was easy to find and street parking was ample.

The restaurant itself looked like a mansion preserved from the Victorian Era, and was well kept. The entrance was surrounded by flower planters featuring multi-coloured perennials.

Upon entering Hogan's, we were greeted immediately and seated next to a massive window which looked out onto a beautifully landscaped courtyard.

Already, I was taken with the charm of the property and appreciated the modern decor with a nod to days gone by. I noticed the music - a fusion of hits from the '50s and '60s, sung in French - and the references to King Township (in the form of original art pieces, both sculpture and paintings, with an equestrian feel). I also noticed the clean white table linens, long stemmed wine glasses, folded linen napkins, stained glass windows, bronze statues and blue carpeting. If the food was as tasteful as the decor, then I knew we were in for an amazing dining experience.

Our bar order was taken by a knowledgeable waiter, who recommended a dry white for me, a cocktail made with premium spirits for my friend, and two pints of local draft beer for our gentlemen.

The wine was delicious and we all toasted to a great meal ahead.

Upon opening the menu, it was a nice surprise to see that the offerings were listed in French (descriptions in English) which drive home the idea that this country gem was indeed serious about providing a truly classic French experience. Perusing the menu, I was pleased to see a wide range of offerings; lots of fresh seafood, poultry and steak selections as well as the weekend special of lamb and prime rib. The menu also offered a history of the restaurant itself, which made for some pleasant dinner conversation.

We learned that Hogan's Inn was established in 1851 by Issac Dennis, who originally built the structure as a hotel for his daughter and her husband, John Hogan.

Travellers and salesmen were transported to the hotel from the train station by horse and buggy where they would set up their displays and sell their wares to local tradesman.

A race track behind the hotel, and the dance hall beside Hogan's ensured there was always a lot of traffic through the hotel which contained a tap room which stands today, The Hunt Pub.

'Quality live entertainment on weekends in a delightful original setting of natural stone accented with leather and oak recalls the spirit of uncomplicated times long ago. With dining and quality unmatched in York Region, a strong commitment to serving local produce and an enduring sense of warm hospitality, Hogan's today, as it did more than 160 years ago, remains a testament to the spirit of King Township,' read the menu.

The manager, Chris Warner, approached our table. He welcomed us to Hogan's and thanked us for choosing his establishment. Chris went over the menu items and described the evenings specials. He left us with a lot to think about, and as he departed we pondered our choices over our drink order.

What we knew for sure, was on this occasion we wanted the full dining experience. Appies, entrées and dessert. My husband and I, who both love a good Caesar salad and don't share well, decided to get our own salads. My friend and her husband were split between the fresh tomato salad, the squid and the jumbo sea scallops. So we ordered it all.

Our appetizers arrived as our appetites kicked-in and we were pleasantly surprised with the portion size.

The lettuce in our salads was fresh and hand torn. The dressing was homemade and had the perfect balance of ingredients. The acid, probably lemon juice, paired nicely with the anchovies and garlic and the homemade garlic crostini and shaved aged parmesan cheese completed the aesthetic. The surprise was finding a delicious mouthful of duck confit (leg of duck cooked in its own rendered fat), as garnish. It was something I would definitely consider ordering in an entrée size on my next trip to Hogan's.

The grilled calamari was served halved and fresh. It looked like it could have been harvested from the ocean earlier that day. No breading or ketchup based sauces were needed to enhance this dish. It was served with a side of dressed field greens and a wedge of lemon. We picked at it eagerly, and nothing was wasted.

The tomato salad was a bright array of farm-fresh tomato slices. Crumbled chevre, fresh basil, angled English cucumbers and red onions completed both a delicious salad, and a stunning visual effect. An aged balsamic reduction kissed the dish, and my friend ate every bite (sharing just a small portion with me). She used the last slice of tomato to mop up any remaining dressing, letting nothing go to waste.

The jumbo sea scallops were served on a bed of corn succotash and finished with a corn truffle puree. They were expertly cooked ? soft in the centre with a perfect sear on the outside.

For our entrées, we again tore the menu apart. My husband had a steak ? a seven-ounce beef tenderloin, ordered medium (although I normally disagree with a meat temperature above rare, I had to admit his steak was cooked perfectly). We learned from our server the Hogan's Inn uses naturally raised animals for almost all of their protein dishes. The Angus beef tenderloin was naturally raised on a Mennonite farm close to Orangeville, and supplied by Brooker's Natural Meats. The taste and quality of a 100 per cent grass fed animal that has never had an antibiotic, hormone or steroid injection, was superb! Cast iron seared (very traditional French style), this steak never saw an open flame, resulting in a perfect sear with nowhere for the juices to go but in. His steak was served with potatoes and Frenched green beans as well as a rather unusual, albeit tasty, homemade marrow butter. The creamy and nutty flavour of the marrow paired well with the steak. An added touch that disappeared with every bite he took.

I ordered the rack of lamb. My four, bone-in chops, were encrusted in a coarse Provençale Dijon mustard rub. The meat was pan seared before hitting the oven, and served pink and juicy on the inside. The plate was complete with fingerling potatoes, dressed green beans and an au jus made from pan drippings. Needless to say, I cleaned my plate.

My friend ordered the weekend special ? oven roasted prime rib. Served medium-rare, the healthy and thick cut protein was paired with seasonally selected green beans, mashed potatoes and a fresh Yorkshire Pudding. The au jus served with the beef was salted perfectly and made an excellent dipping sauce for everything on her plate.

Her husband, originally torn between the duck confit / duck foie gras duo, and the Ontario pickerel or Atlantic salmon, cut the difference and ordered the half chicken coq au vin. The skin was served perfectly crispy and golden brown on this all-time favorite poultry dish. Topped with fresh field mushrooms, rendered pancetta and caramelized onions, the plate was elegant and delicious. Golden potatoes and seasonal vegetables were neatly tucked under the generously sized portion of this naturally raised, free run, organic-fed bird. The red wine reduction sauce was a brilliant finish.

When we do return to Hogan's Inn, we certainly will be sharing what appears to be the star of the menu, and what most consider the epitome fo haute-cuisine; the Chateaubriand for two. Unfortunately, the restaurant had already sold out of the centre-cut piece of the prized tenderloin, so make sure you call in ahead of time if you have your heart set on it!

Already satisfied from an excellent culinary offering, we decided to ?just take a peek? at the dessert menu. The selection was too much for us to ignore, and once again, we decided to order one of everything.

Our platter arrived along side our specialty coffees and included a bananas foster crape topped with fresh whipped cream, a slice of chocolate torte, a freshly torched crème brûlée, and an apple strudel. Fresh berries and a smudge of chocolate for dipping garnished the plate to perfection. Yummy!

Made fresh in-house, these desserts were the perfect end to a delicious and indulgent experience at the historic and iconic Hogan's Inn.

After dessert, we were honoured to meet with chef Meagan Andrews who came to our table on a break from a busy kitchen. We thanked her for her creativity, menu selections and use of fresh ingredients. We could tell she was as passionate about food as we were, which resulted in a superior product. ?I can taste the love in your food,? I remember saying.

Chris came to see us out. We told him that the delicious food, and classic French menu, combined with the warm atmosphere and the expert (yet unintrusive) service we'd had, had all led to a great night out.

My foodie friends and I promised to return again and again.

Hogan's Inn is located in King Township at 12998 Keele St. The Dining Room is open daily for lunch and dinner from 12 noon; and the Hunt Pub is open Tuesday to Saturday from 4 p.m. until close. Sunday brunch is offered every Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. for \$28 per person for an unlimited, full-service experience. Children 12 and under pay their age.

Book your reservation by calling 905-833-5311 or online at hogansinn.com/reservation



