

Lunch with **Andrei Lussmann**

at **Lussmanns Fish & Grill**, Bishop's Stortford

Three times a charm

Non-stop restaurateur Andrei Lussmann discusses his latest venture with food and drink editor Richard Cawthorne

ONE glance at Andrei Lussmann's menu for his Lussmanns Fish & Grill restaurant in Bishop's Stortford should be enough to persuade any would-be customer this is a place worth visiting. The man is carving a reputation for the quality, range and value for money of the food he offers and the dishes listed make the point more than adequately.

The Bishop's Stortford outlet is the third in the Lussmann's Hertfordshire group, joining similar operations in Hertford and St Albans. These two have already established themselves as local favourites and their new cousin is well on the way to repeating the story.

The emphasis throughout all three restaurants is on provenance and sustainability, points picked up approvingly by the Good Food Guide, which listed the St Albans outlet as a new entry in the 2010 edition and has kept it in for 2011. The operation was also named St Albans' best restaurant for 2010.

The menu makes the point with special panels proclaiming the chicken as free range, the award-winning beef as grass fed and traditionally reared and the fish, caught using ecologically-friendly methods, sustainable. The pork loin that Andrei recommends for lunch is woodland reared and organic and comes with mash and chestnut mushroom, pancetta and rosemary sauce. Andrei selects the popular steak frites, whose provenance is also listed.

Andrei's enthusiasm and dedication



are infectious. He has been in the business for almost 20 years, absorbing all that Forte, Bass and TGI Friday could teach him and completing a Hospitality & Business degree at Birmingham Polytechnic along the way. He then moved to Pizza Express, progressing steadily up the management ladder, before heading for the Fish Diner company and then wine supplier Corney & Barrow.

He set up Lussmanns in 2002 with a modest eatery in north Kensington but ran out of room to expand and moved to Hertfordshire with the idea, as he puts it, of 'opening a proper restaurant'. Or, as his menus proclaim,

'somewhere for people to enjoy good, ethically-sourced food served in an attractive and timely manner and at value-for-money prices'.

Relating all this, Andrei's conversation is peppered with references to his own past at Pizza Express and to similar chains, all of which he credits with revolutionising high street dining out. 'These companies persuaded people they could go out for a decent meal at a reasonable price,' he says. 'The customers knew what they were getting and compared with what had gone before it was a good deal.'

Changing times have seen the

FOOD & DRINK



Left Andrei Lussmann **Above left** Inside the light and airy St Albans restaurant **Above right** The riverside terrace at Lussmanns Bishop's Stortford is perfect for alfresco dining **Below** The inviting Bishop's Stortford restaurant on the water's edge



emergence of what he calls the 'premium casual' sphere, resulting in the likes of Cote, Brasserie Blanc and Jamie's Italian, a branch of which is on track to open soon in St Albans. He pitches Lussmanns somewhere above these, arguing convincingly that customers are happy to pay a little bit more for the sake of the quality food he offers.

A steadily-growing string of awards mean Andrei is almost satisfied he has the food side on the right track, though, given the nature of the man, that doesn't mean he is about to rest on his laurels. For the moment, his thoughts are on how to make the spacious Bishop's

Stortford restaurant – his biggest, at 150 covers, compared with Hertford's 70 and St Albans' 100 – even better known and even more welcoming.

Ideas on this front include the Lussmanns Roadshow, which appeared at 18 events last year, a top line-up of the UK's best Jazz musicians on Wednesday nights and a pianist every Saturday, plus plans to capitalise on the riverside terrace which is a key asset when the warmer weather arrives.

Above all, Andrei displays a natural optimism which even the threat of recession has failed to dent. He says it

did him a favour. 'It made us realise we could do much more to attract our customers and engage with them,' he adds, making clear that's just what he is about to do.

Reserve a table

Lussmanns Fish & Grill
 4 Adderley Road
 Jacksons Wharf
 Bishop's Stortford CM23 3AL
 01279 759 115
www.lussmanns.com