



Wine Dine Relax – The Market House

The Market House which is Palmers newest pub opens at 10am on Wednesday 10th.

We were invited along to the preview event on Monday and it was a good chance to introduce ourselves to the management team and also cast some first impressions.

It is fair to say that it's far more impressive inside than what you can see by pressing your nose up against the front window.

I was very interested to see Palmers first pub opening in the Bridport area since the smoking ban. The industry has defiantly changed since and it is very noticeable between walking into a pub that has been refurbished since compared with one that hasn't.

Gone have all the sticky tables, the stained carpets, the cluttered walls, the dated lighting and more importantly the muggy smells that appeared once the smoke disappeared. Now pubs are clean environments where during the day they can easily double up as Cafes.

Also a thirty year old company has sprung up which has to be mentioned that has not set any high standards but has set an expectation of what a typical customer will now expect as a baseline, that company of course being J D Wetherspoon. It makes sure a menu is placed on every table to promote both its food and drink, even when customers aren't eating. They highlight their toilets in all their marketing literature, knowing the theory that the state of a pub's toilet reflects the state of its kitchen. Their biggest success while it can be also seen as a reason to avoid the chain is that every Wetherspoon feels and looks the same, which gives the customer a homely feel, the sort of feeling expected from your 'local'.

While on Wednesday I am sure you will read an open and shut story about a new pub opening in the papers, there is something more radical about the opening of The Market House that I am impressed with. Palmers have always pushed the fact that they are a drinks making company, a brewery, and while I can't cite any sources, because of this their foremost push has always been to create drink selling pubs which have had to over the years been adapted to sell food. To what extent their tenants have adopted this strategy is questionable, as I'm sure most are happier to have a pub full of diners at lunch rather than a pub full of drinkers at the same time, the fact is that every pub now has to serve food to survive.

What is different about The Market House is from the start you can see Palmers along with their new landlord is attempting to try a new strategy, which is to

promote their food as king. The whole pub is set out ready for dining with only three relaxation sofa pods and another seated area for traditional drink socialising. Everything is clean, not just in the hygienic sense but also the style with the scattering of accessories to try to create a traditional pub feel. While new to Palmers the food-first strategy isn't new to the new landlord. I prefer to call them a management team as the family already operate two other pubs in nearby towns. Son and daughter will run The Market House while husband and wife will satellite around their pub empire on a daily basis.

As you would expect for a new pub it offers all the latest mod cons; disabled access, swish toilets, stylish coffee machine, air conditioning, TV screens and a sound system throughout, it does however lack WiFi which seems to be a short term oversight rather than a deliberate omission.

I am assured the use of the venue will be strongly enforced with no entertainment apart from the odd TV sports event. I did spot some scanner lighting (disco lighting) above what would be a perfect dance floor earlier in the week, however these have been swiftly removed.

The connections and brackets of course still exist and indicates that Palmers aren't stupid, there is a plan B for this venue, though I sure if entertainment does start to occur it will still be of the classy variety.

Prices will be higher than neighbouring venues, which may encourage more movement around the town of people, which is always a test of a healthy nightlife, popping in for one or two before moving on.

Overall I was very impressed with this new 'empty' pub, how things turn out only time will tell.

Some images that were taken on the day can be found at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/oninbridders/sets/72157623464458859/>

Written by
David Graham
On-In-Bridders

E: Enquiry@
W: OnInBridders.co.uk

On-In-Bridders, 4th Floor, Melbury House,
1-3 Oxford Road, Bournemouth, BH8 8ES

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