

restaurants etc



off the beaten track charles champion

The Lobster Pot 3 Kennington Lane, SE11 (0171-582 5556)

You have to feel for Nathalie Régent. What must it be like to be married to a man whose love of the bizarre is obviously something of an obsession? Britain is famed for breeding dangerously potty eccentrics, but incomer Hervé Régent – originally from Vannes in Brittany – is well ahead of the field. Walk down Kennington Lane towards the restaurant and it's even money whether you are first struck by the life-size painted plywood cut-out of Hervé dressed in oilskins, or the lobster pots and nets cluttering the pavement. On second thoughts, the speakers which relay a soundtrack of seagulls and melancholy Breton foghorns to the outside world are also pretty unusual. Inside, the restaurant has portholes as windows and behind them swim fish. What can you say about somewhere with a life belt hanging in the gents? It's all rather good fun.

What's good?

The clues all point towards fish. Doubtless Hervé will appear (moustache bristling, and in nautical garb) to guide you. The fish is fresh, if on the verge of being expensive. Starters range from £6.50 – a good, very thick, traditional fish soup – to le

plateau de fruits de mer (small £10.15; large £21). There are daily specials such as a cassoulet of lobster with wild mushrooms (£12.50) – a large portion of lobster and wild mushrooms in a delicious, but artery-clogging, cream sauce. The main-course specials feature strange fish that Hervé has discovered on his early-morning wanderings around Billingsgate. Mahi mahi (also known as dolphin fish), from the Indian Ocean, arrives in a thick tranche with a 'skin' of smoked salmon and accompanied by fresh samphire (£18.50) – delicious. Simpler, and as good in its way, is la sélection de la mer à l'ail (£14.50), which is a range of fishy bits: some monkfish tail, an oyster, a bit of sole and tiny squid. Also try the soft, doughy pain rustique. And, for once, le plateau de fromages à la française (£6.50) doesn't disappoint.

Experts only

The Lobster Pot is open Tuesday to Saturday. The weekday set lunch for £15.50 – which could be les moules gratinées à l'ail, followed by le filet de merlan sauce créole, and la crêpe sauce à la mangue – makes lots of sense. You can imagine you're in France, or on *Desert Island Discs*.