



## Eight Point Two

TONI MASON

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Dinner Tues-Sat from 6pm

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See the [Restaurant reviews rating guide](#)

Though compact, the menu had decision-defying choices. It had been a slightly unsettled start to the year for this gem on the North Shore, with a period between head chefs, so it must have been with some relief that owner Lindsay Swannack greeted new head chef **Nigel Marriage**.

Classically trained, **Marriage** comes with an impressive pedigree. He's just finished a stint as head chef at the Devon restaurant of John Burton Race (of French Leave fame), The New Angel. The pair originally worked together under the legendary Raymond Blanc in the 1980s, before teaming up again at Burton Race's L'Ortolan, which won two Michelin stars.

So we descended upon the smartly rebuilt villa in suburban Birkenhead to see if **Marriage's** arrival made for a happy union.

Settling on the confit duck leg with grated celeriac and sliced apples was easy enough, and it fulfilled the promise of crisp skin cloaking melt-in-the-mouth flesh. For our other choice, perfectly formed crab ravioli swam in a seafood broth spiked with ginger, chilli and coriander.

Mains (\$24.50-\$25.50) presented even more of a challenge. Boned chicken breast stuffed with leek and ham hock sounded brilliant, as did braised lamb shanks (\$19.50 for one, or \$24.50 for two) with parsnip purée and rosemary red wine jus. We went with the pork dish of walnut-crusted loin and a crackled square of belly.

The accompaniments almost outshone the succulent stars – the savoy cabbage was beautifully braised and the potatoes had undergone some ingenious treatment involving cider and a blast in the oven to finish. The venison Denver leg, seared then sliced into medallions, also had perfect partners in lightly fried kumara gnocchi with rich, almost fruity, braised red cabbage. Sadly, the slightly tough meat let the side down.

In the desserts, the chocolate fondant was a heavenly peak filled with a flow of melting chocolate beside a ball of praline ice-cream. I didn't want it to end.

Most wines are available by the glass, and there are no fears in going that way here as they use the Le Verre de Vin wine preservation system so opened bottles don't oxidise.

Swannack's experience in the dining world shows in seamless service – genial and professional, he's the perfect host.