



■ **Ham&High** photographer Polly Hancock joined Joseph at Pane Vino

Cash4Cheques (no spaces) and one door down from BetFred (no spaces), but at least not so far down as to be cheek by jowl with CarpetRight (no spaces). This is the emporium that screams in its adverts about being stricken by a neurosis called "Carpet Madness!!!", under the effects of which broadloom is offered at 80 per cent off, and even more if you bring in this advert and yet more still if you just ask for it. In the end they pay you handsomely to accept their carpet, and the bloke

who comes to fit it you get to keep.

Anyhoo ... Kentish Town is actually pretty trendy these days, and there are good and well priced places to eat all around Pane Vino: the Oxford opposite, Kentish Canteen a hop away and Chicken Shop, the Vine and the Bull & Last (all reviewed here in the past) easily walkable. But whatever Pane Vino is, trendy it ain't. The interior is old fashioned, though comforting: travertine floor, proper cloths and napkins, but with tables practically touching

one another. And it is really rather too expensive for the area and the experience: a not-filled glass of prosecco £6.50, bread £1.50, small espresso £2.60, starter portions of pasta £10.90, mains up to £18 ... and while they haven't been looking, cool and budget-conscious Kentish Town has moved maybe not so much on, as sideways ... and away from them.

My guest was Polly Hancock – how many times have you seen her byline on pictures in the *Ham&High*? She has been snapping away for the paper for more than a decade – and at my insistence (for she is very modest) you can glimpse her for the first time in her rather fab montage that accompanies this review. She wasn't always a press photographer – but her father was:

I asked her which photographers she most admired and she said "my Dad ... and David Bailey". But get this: she used to be a pop star ...! She and a friend called Wendy in the late 1980s became the Popinjays! They simply recorded a demo cassette (Polly did the music, Wendy the lyrics) sent it to a promoter and soon were doing a John Peel session, featuring in *Melody Maker* and recording on the One Little Indian label (as did the Sugacubes and the Shamen) They toured with They Could Be Giants and one of their singles (they also did three albums) reached number 17 in the US charts! Crumbs. So Polly had more than her 15 minutes of fame: I like to think of it as Hancock's half hour. The group disbanded amicably and Polly took to deejaying, handling the Abba sound-alikes Bjorn Again – the first tribute band – and soon was booking gigs for the Mean Fiddler. Though still just shimmering tantalisingly in the distant future was the coming and dizzying acme of her career: taking pictures of me in restaurants.

#### Sea bass

And in this restaurant, Polly wanted grilled sea bass in salamoia (rosemary, sage and garlic in salt) with roast potatoes and spinach ... but the waitress side of the proprietress informed her that she couldn't, because "the fish man hasn't yet delivered". Which I thought may have been just a line ... and right at that moment the fish man turned up! I was rather impressed by that. And the sea bass proved to be excellent: large, crisp-skinned, delicate and much enjoyed – though the potatoes contrived at the same time to be both oily and dry. But before that we had shared a decent platter of Sardinian antipasti; thinly sliced cured wild boar (very good), goat (rather fatty), highly seasoned sausage (ditto) and quite fine bresaola. These were served on a sort of crispy parmesan poppadom affair and strewn with nuggety sun-dried tomato, olives, pecorino cheese and ... mullet roe: a speciality of the house, mullet roe is (they have devoted a pasta dish

to it) though I can't see why, as it's not at all nice. To follow that I had wanted beef ragout gnocchi with parmesan ... but the cook side of the proprietress regretted that she hadn't made any: a sign of a proper kitchen to be sure, though pretty bloody disappointing nonetheless. So I instead had ravioli stuffed with porcini and ricotta in a rather too buttery sauce – but al dente, flavoursome and satisfying.

Polly was sipping a Peroni beer, and I wanted something red: of the house variety, it said "table wine obtained by accurate use of the grapes, fragrant soft with pleasant taste", so I had something else. Then I read this: "Please note that bottles will be opened only at customer's risk about their (sic) quality". Unprecedented, in my experience, and a laughably poor show: this restaurant really is rather out of step, you know. Soon my highly entertaining time with the ex-Popinjay would be up – but not before she could slaughter a baked pear in red wine with vanilla ice cream (which would have been a whole lot better had it been warm, and not fridge-cold) and I had a very good panna cotta surrounded by far too much blackcurrant coulis. And so in a rainy Kentish Town Road I said "Bye then, P – thanks for coming!" and she said "Well I thought I'd just pop in, J!". She didn't, actually – but it would have been good.

■ All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk). Joseph Connolly's latest novel, ENGLAND'S LANE, is published by Quercus as a hardback and an ebook.

## FACTFILE

- **PANE VINO**  
323 Kentish Town Road, NW5  
Tel: 020-7267 3879
- Open Mon-Sat noon-2.30pm, 6.30pm-11pm.
- Food: ★★★★★☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★☆☆
- The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆
- Cost: More than it should be.  
About £90 for three course meal for two with wine.

“ While they haven't been looking, budget-conscious Kentish Town has moved maybe not so much on, as sideways... and away from them



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