



## Restaurant Review:

# Talliston Supper Club: Tastes of Tuscany

The opportunity arose to attend something totally different this month, Talliston Supper Club's Tastes of Tuscany Italian Dinner Party.

The supper club hold various themed evenings at Talliston such as A Hallowe'en Dinner Party, A Valentine's Day Dinner Party and Tastes of Marrakesh: A Moroccan Dinner Party. All these are coming up.

But what and where is Talliston you may well ask? Well, as we found out, Talliston is definitely not like any other supper club. It is a house in our locality that has been transformed.

I found out more about Talliston from founder, John Trevillian, who bought a three bedroomed semi detached ex-council house in Dunmow back in October 1990. This, John told me, was the start of a personal journey which grew into a twenty five year project to build what he describes as a living breathing fantasy world.

John's aim was to take the most standard English dwelling he could imagine and transform it into a wonderland of inspirational locations, each set in a different time and place, by deconstructing each room back to brickwork then rebuilding from scratch. John has used only tradesmen essential to compliance with building regulations (structural, electrical and gas). The rest of the skills have had to be learned along the way, along with many volunteers including craftspeople, artists and architects. Quite an undertaking and a very unusual project!



So last Friday, feeling a touch nervous, my good friend Mel and myself went along to discover Talliston for ourselves. We were told to arrive at 7.30pm with our own wine if we wished and given directions, which were quite unusual! When we arrived on the road we were to treat the crescent as a clock and look for the gate at 3 o'clock. We found this quite easily (it is a distinctive and quite attractive gate) and thought that apart from this, the outside of the house looked very normal.

We were greeted by John who had told me there would be seven or eight of us dining and that he had a big variety of people attending each supper club but primarily they tended to be aged from around thirty to mid fifties, some couples and some single people.

Our pleasant waitress, Rebecca, took away our wine and brought us back a glass each in due course. We wandered outside for a look at the wonderful and atmospheric garden and on our return some other guests had arrived. There were two Malaysian gentlemen and a Portuguese woman. One was an engineer, another was a nurse, ordinary friendly people. They were all very nice and we struck up an interesting and easy conversation.

The other two expected guests had cancelled at the last minute so we were ready to begin dinner. We sat at the nicely laid long table which was comfortable and with plenty of space. Down the centre was a beautiful platter of delightful crusty bread and small grapes, impressively grown in the garden. Our first course of the Tastes of Tuscany menu was a really nicely presented and quite unusual baked avocado served with a selection of sliced cured meats and a delicious dressing. I really enjoyed this course and it was probably my favourite of the meal.

This was followed by Panzanella, a traditional Tuscan bread and tomato salad served with onions, cucumber and basil. All the food was fresh, flavoursome and seemed very Italian. The main was Spezzatino di Maiale—a herb infused pork stew with sage and celery served in a white wine sauce with herbed, roasted potatoes. This was not something I've had before but was nicely seasoned and quite light. Mel was so impressed she went to grill the chef about tips for slow cooking meat.

Our final dish was poached Figs in Red Wine served with a wonderful Mascarpone cheese. Plenty of small courses gave us the opportunity to sample lots of great food and it is clear that the chef, Marcus Cotton, is competent and innovative.

After the meal John took everyone round the house to see each individual room with so many unusual and clever touches. I wouldn't want to tell you too much detail so as not to spoil your own experience should you decide to go along!

Here is a comment John was delighted to receive from a previous diner:

*“ I simply have to email and say what a wonderful experience last night was. I have woken today full of inspiration and I literally feel as if I travelled to a magical land last night, like I've woken from a dream (and I was on the water)  
Thank you for creating such a wonder and sharing it, I feel so privileged to have been a part of such an adventure.  
I will be coming back with everyone I know ...”*

This is certainly the way forward for an unusual experience if you are brave enough and fancy meeting a new group of people. As well as supper clubs at this venue there are regular meetings of a writers circle, poetry circle and coming soon, a night bar. What have you got to lose?

*Katherine Phillips*

For more details:  
**Talliston House and Gardens**  
***The Secret Lies Within.....***  
**www.talliston.com**



