



Lunch with...

The Pheasant, Gestingthorpe

THE Pheasant sits between Halstead and Sudbury amid rolling countryside, writes Stephanie Mackentyre. A 500-year-old building, the restaurant has been completely redecorated by James and Diana Donoghue since they purchased it in the summer of 2006. It's bijou and the beamed dining area is spread across two rooms with an archway between. Each room has a welcoming wood burner to keep the winter chill at bay and there's a genuinely homely feel about the place, with its natural wood tables and plenty of interesting reading matter within arms reach.

In 2008 The Pheasant won Best Newcomer Restaurant but winning is nothing new to James. His previous business was garden design and he exhibited at Chelsea in 2003 and won a bronze for his design. He has recreated the winning design in the garden at the back of The Pheasant, which is a great space for grown ups who want to enjoy the tranquillity and far-reaching views of farmland.

This gardening expertise James now puts to good use in his own impressive vegetable garden where he grows produce to use in his kitchen including fresh herbs, salad leaves and young fruit trees. Regular wicker

weaving days are also held in the garden and gift vouchers are available if you need a Christmas present idea with a difference. In local woods a couple of miles away from The Pheasant, James even keeps his own bees and uses the honey for his dishes too.

Diana is no stranger to the area and worked at Hedingham Castle for 11 years. Diana explains: 'We were both at a stage in our lives when we were looking for a new challenge which would give us a better quality of life

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and we wanted to become part of a community too.'

For lunch we sat at an oval table in the bay window, enjoying the rural views as James brought out our starters – own-smoked scallops from the couple's other business, The Borley Smokery, with slices of black pudding, all sat on top of a slice of caramelised apple. For James colours are often the catalyst which leads him to his ingredients. 'I often take my inspiration from art,' says James. 'I need each dish to look good as well as taste good. You eat with your eyes to begin with.'

This dish was definitely going for the autumnal look. The scallops seared

on the outside let the smooth, smokey flavours flood through. The thin slices of black pudding added drama to the dish and the sweet caramel of the sliced apple lifted it nicely.

Next couldn't really be anything other than pheasant, of course, simply roasted with rosemary, lemon and cider. James describes his dishes as rustic, county cooking. 'I don't like to over style a dish, we are in an idyllic country setting and I want our customers to enjoy delicious simple dishes in great surroundings.'

The pheasant had nicely crisp skin and was served with scallions, watercress and roasted home-grown root vegetables. To complete our meal was a deeply dark chocolate pudding, cut open to let the smoked chocolate and rum fondant flow out. It was served with a scoop of Hadley's pale green pistachio ice cream. Quite simply, words failed me. This is an absolute must for chocoholics.

GET THE TASTE

The Pheasant
Church Street
Gestingthorpe
Near Halstead
CO9 3AU
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Starter



Main course



Dessert