

SUPPER HEROES

Michelin-starred UK chefs? Check. Locally sourced produce? Check. Luxurious rooms in which to stay after an indulgent meal? Check in...

BY AMY BROOMFIELD



LE MANOIR AUX QUAT'SAISONS

Great Milton, Oxford

Raymond Blanc spent much of his childhood at the elbow of *maman* Blanc learning everything he could about French cookery and seasonality. He found work in a local restaurant at the earliest opportunity.

"I began my career as a cleaner," he explains. "And then one day, my dream came true and I was given a waiter's jacket. The trouble was, I couldn't keep my mouth shut – I began to make suggestions to the chef that perhaps his sauce was too salty or too rich, and he responded with a fist in my face!" The chef in question told him he would never work in another kitchen in France, and Blanc was, as he put it, "exiled to England, like Napoleon".

France's loss was the UK's gain; Blanc found work as a sous chef in a pub in Oxfordshire. One day, the head chef fell ill and he took over. "I was amazed," he says. "We began to win awards, and recognition from the *Michelin Guide*, which has continued at Le Manoir [it has held two Michelin stars for 30 years]."

Blanc bought Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons in 1984 and, with the help of his then wife, transformed it into the grand haven it is today. The hotel is surrounded by greenery, a

quaint Japanese garden and two acres of land growing seasonal produce. "Growing food is the heart of what we do; that's how it should be in gastronomy," Blanc says. "These days, people want to know what they're eating. And as chefs, I believe we must connect with our *terroir*, our earth, our farmers and fishermen."

Dinner is à la carte, or in the form of a five- or seven-course tasting menu. For each course, a sommelier is on hand to advise on matching wines – the majority of them French, of course, but not discounting others selected by Blanc. Dishes are as beautiful to look at as they are to eat; even those without a refined palate would recognise the freshness of the raw ingredients.

Among the mains are *agnolotti* (a ravioli-like pasta typical of Piedmont) filled with goat's cheese, honey and artichoke, and Cornish sea bass and Scottish langoustine served on a bed of smoked mash. Dessert includes intensely flavoured Gariguette strawberries with cream cheese, punctuated by the subtle heat of Szechuan pepper. It's not without reason that Blanc's cooking is revered all over the world. The food at Le Manoir is delicate, balanced, fresh and clever – in fact, each dish is close to perfect. ►



FROM TOP Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons; owner and chef Raymond Blanc; grilled Cornish mackerel and pickled mooli with honey and soy dressing



L'ENCLUME
Cartmel, Cumbria

In 2013, for the first time, Heston Blumenthal's Fat Duck had to share its perfect 10 cooking score in *The Good Food Guide* with another restaurant: L'Enclume. The restaurant-with-rooms is where chef Simon Rogan forged his reputation for modernist, precision cooking. "Our food showcases local, seasonal and foraged produce," Rogan says. "We like to explore complex texture and flavour combinations."

Much of the produce comes from L'Enclume's 800-acre farm nearby, which grows vegetables, herbs and edible flowers. The menu depends on what ingredients are ready to harvest; L'Enclume serves between eight and 12 dishes every evening. Starters might include oyster pebbles, chicken skin and black pudding, or crab sacks; mains often feature Rogan's gastronomic masterpiece, which looks like an egg but is actually cod mousse. "My favourite dish on the menu is the venison in coal oil [a technique in which oil is poured over hot coals to infuse it with a smoky barbecue flavour]," Rogan says. "We source the venison from the Cartmel Valley, and the micro-fennel and fennel shoots come from our own farm."



GIDLEIGH PARK
Chagford, Devon

Nestled in a wooded valley on the Dartmoor borders is the Tudor-styled Gidleigh Park, culinary home of the Michelin-starred chef Michael Caines. Since joining the hotel's restaurant in 1994, he has transformed the venue into one of the best foodie destinations in the south. Gidleigh Park won Best Restaurant in Britain in the 2013-14 *Sunday Times* Food List, and Caines won an MBE in the process.

Born locally in Exeter, there's no better representative for Devon and the south coast than Caines. "Ours is a very creative and English menu," he says. "We achieve that by using high-quality local ingredients so all our guests have good memories to take away with them."

Beautifully assembled meals comprise vegetables and fresh fruit sourced directly from the kitchen garden on site, alongside locally produced duck, cod or plump shoulder of Dartmoor lamb. "September is a great month, with so many fresh ingredients available. But if I had to choose one dish as my favourite, it would be my white chocolate and raspberry dessert, which is new to the menu," Caines says.



THE POMPADOUR BY GALVIN AT THE WALDORF ASTORIA EDINBURGH
Edinburgh

Overlooking Edinburgh's Princes Street, The Pompadour first opened its doors in 1925 in what was then the Caledonian Hotel. A recent refurbishment saw the grandeur of the Grade II-listed dining room sensitively restored, but the most dramatic change has been in the food, which came under the control of the multi-Michelin-starred Galvin brothers in 2012. "We take inspiration from the season and the market before we write the menu," says Chris Galvin. "It ensures we work with the best ingredients."

As per the brothers' speciality, the dishes are French in style, but use Scottish ingredients. Favourites include roast Orkney scallops with parsnip purée, and roast monkfish. Chris Galvin also recommends the grouse when it's in season. "Without a doubt, it's the best dish on our menu. It comes from the Scottish Highlands and is one of the most outstanding ingredients in the world. Grouse heralds the oncoming autumn and harvest time after a season of light flavours. It also pairs beautifully with a glass of Tolle-Beaut Chöre-les-Beaune Pièce du Chapitre."



THE LATYMER AT PENNYHILL PARK
Bagshot, Surrey

It may be the training ground of England's rugby team, but you wouldn't know it from the 123 acres of immaculate greenery that surround Pennyhill Park. The country house, which dates back to 1849, is the epitome of luxury, and famous for its landmark restaurant, The Latymer. Chef Michael Wignall joined in 2007, and his perfectionism has transformed the venue into one of Michelin-star quality (the hotel currently holds two stars, alongside five AA Rosettes). Wignall has applied his signature modern British approach to create a constantly evolving 10-course tasting menu.

"We check the markets and speak to growers and breeders to plan the menu each day," he says. "Our food revolves heavily around the seasons and our team; everyone has input." The restaurant sources from suppliers in France, Italy, Spain and the UK; it also forages from the hotel grounds. "We're working closely with a farmer in Cumbria who's breeding goats," Wignall says. "This will be a perfect dish for autumn; we intend to serve it with seasonal truffles, Brillat-Savarin and micro-pumpkin sponge."

