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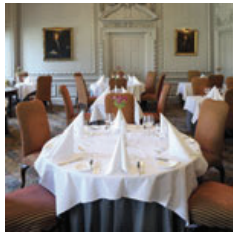
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Menuwatch – Stapelford Park

Olivia Greenway
Wednesday 09 February 2011 15:56



David Ellams has recently been promoted to the role of head chef at Stapelford Park, where he serves a modern British menu in its fine-dining restaurant, the Grinling Gibbons room. Olivia Greenway reports

David Ellams seems to have landed on his feet. Not only does he work in the beautiful 17th century Stapelford Park country house hotel, he's also just been promoted to head chef. With 13 years in the business, he has had stints at Overton Grange, Summer Lodge, Mortons House and most recently he was executive sous chef at Stapelford.

Ellams has a brigade of 12 chefs and is responsible for the fine-dining operation as well as room service, banqueting and the more casual menu served in the Terrace, Lounge and Old Kitchen.

He says: "We bake all our own bread and pastries. We even do some of our own butchering." He buys free range pork from Debbie Green at Scaford Meadow.

The fine-dining menu is available from Wednesday to Saturday in the 30-seat Grinling Gibbons room, named after the artist who carved the mantelpiece. Ellams offers three courses for £46.50, with a choice of seven dishes for each course.

The modern British menu features fish quite heavily and Ellams uses a range of suppliers. "Some of it is straight from Cornwall and we use Rutland trout when it's in season," he says. The diver scallops are a popular choice and available all year. They are simply pan-fried with rock salt and served with an apple and ginger purée made from Granny Smith apples, root ginger and fresh lime juice, together with an apple salad using julienne strips of apple with frisée lettuce.

Ellams' favourite among the main courses is halibut. "I use wild halibut and fry it in butter with fresh thyme. It is served with caramelised cauliflower, baby capers to cut through the richness, and caviar."

The menu has imaginative elements as Ellams tries to cater for all tastes. A case in point is the pigeon served with carpaccio of beetroot, trompettes and wild rocket. The thinly sliced beetroot is marinated in aged balsamic vinegar and virgin olive oil. The pigeon breast is then served with a confit made from the pigeon leg.

By far the best seller is the 28-day-aged beef, from Mark Patrick in Birstall, served with parsley risotto, garlic purée and red wine sauce. Ellams cooks it in a water bath and then seals the outside by frying it in olive oil.

Desserts are exceptional and Ellams favours serving small portions of up to five elements. "The chocolate assiette is the best seller on the dessert menu," he explains. Five chocolate confections - brûlée, tarte, fondant, mousse and sorbet -

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are arranged in a line along a rectangular white plate. Pastry chef Simon McNeil puts his Carpigiani ice cream maker to good use with unusual sorbets and ice-cream complementing his creations.

The location of the hotel means it can't depend on passing trade so it relies on destination diners. Fortunately, the quality of Ellams' cooking speaks for itself.

SAMPLE DISHES FROM THE MENU

STARTERS

Rillettes of milk-fed rabbit, roast loin, carrot purée and broad beans
John Dory, baby squid, fennel salad and pistachio sauce
Pressing of foie gras and Gressingham duck, roasted fig, brioche (£5.95 supplement)

MAIN COURSES

Hake fillet, roasted salsify, fondant potatoes, watercress sauce
Highland venison, carrot and maple purée, Savoy cabbage, blackberry jus (£7.50 extra)
Seared wild sea bass, borlotti beans and vanilla (£5 extra)

DESSERTS

Roasted fig soufflé, mini apple strudel, clotted cream ice cream (£2.95 extra)
Carrot cake, cream cheese sorbet, walnut parfait (£3.50 extra)
Roast plum tart tatin, ginger rice pudding, poached pear

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