



»» **Miriam Stoppard**
on life at Bamburgh Castle

PAGE 3

»» **Mayhem at La Folie**
The British invade France

PAGE 12



weekend

BRITAIN'S TOP 50 SUMMER RESTAURANTS

At a recent conference to celebrate the renaissance of British food, the speakers reminisced about the wonderful dining experiences they'd enjoyed abroad. I wish I could have been there to sketch for these blinkered relics the British dining scene of 2009. Alas I was too busy working, out in the great British countryside, troughing.

True, you can't yet randomly fall upon fine restaurants in Britain as you can (sometimes) in France or Italy, but is it too cynical to wonder if these supposed gastronomes might have so enjoyed a feast abroad because they

were on holiday? British restaurants are still patchy, but we should enjoy the momentous culinary journey we have taken, not scowl at the distance still to travel.

When I hang up my knife and fork for 2009 and grant my stomach a well-earned rest, I'll have heaved it around restaurants located everywhere from the top of Mount Snowdon to the flats of Norfolk, and from the Isles of Scilly to the Scottish Highlands. And I will have enjoyed (almost) every mouthful.

London is well-established as a global culinary capital, but my delight is discovering little restaurants further afield, for each find

Food lovers no longer need to venture abroad for top quality cooking. **Jasper Gerard** selects his favourite places across the country

proves the British food revolution has marched far farther than London-based conference experts could possibly imagine.

I was amazed to find behind an industrial estate near Nottingham a chef as gifted as Sat Bains. And on the toe of Cornwall a Maori-Chinese chef (Jude Kereama at Kota) serving inventively delicious food with flowers. And in the wilds of Yorkshire a publican (Andrew Pern at the Star Inn) producing extraordinarily accomplished cuisine from plough to plate. And how about that Scottish chippy serving the freshest fish I've ever tasted?

There have been numerous memorable

experiences. Now that the recession has forced even elite restaurants to shave prices as well as truffles, more enthusiasts than ever can eat out – brilliantly.

This list is not definitive, but is much ruminated over. These are personal favourites I recommend with confidence. In some regions dozens of eating stations nestle close to the summit; in others, the culinary expedition has only recently left base camp. Explore these if you can and let me know what you think. Happy scoffing.

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Some diners claim poor service has left them stranded on the rocks, but with great fresh seafood at bargain prices, many happily tug into port here. Fabulous oysters. Family fun on the beach, Boden jeans and media jabber.

Midlands

Fawsley Hall

Nr Daventry, Northants

(01327 892000;

www.fawsleyhall.com)

After a couple of looseners in the vast drawing room, you probably won't care about dinner. Vast? They say you can see all the way across to the fireplace on a clear day.

Elements are a little Heston-wannabe, but highly accomplished.

Purnell's

Cornwall Street, Birmingham

(0121 212 9799;

www.purnellsrestaurant.com)

Glynn Purnell is only 34, but the Brummie leads his city's culinary march. His cooking is humorous as well as tasty, like goat's cheese mousse with a square of reduced jelly in homage to *Abigail's Party* cocktail culture. Haddock with cornflakes? No really, taste, then criticise.

Entropy

Hinckley Road, Leicester

(0116 225 9650;

www.entropyife.com)

Chef Tom Cockerill has a degree in physics, virtually a job requirement where he started, the Fat Duck. Now taking a further degree in flavour and perception. He undertakes stints in the kitchens of the world's finest restaurants. It shows.