

Fine bistro begs a visit



Alfreda's is a delightful place

ALFREDA'S



Address: Market Street, Nailsworth
Food: Regular changing specials
Atmosphere: Intimate
Service: Quick
Prices: Two-course lunch £9.50; three courses £12.50
Contact: 01453 839251/
www.alfredascuisine.co.uk

DIDN'T imagine you could find such a place in a small rural town like Nailsworth.

When I lived there a few years ago, what is now Alfreda's was an empty greengrocers and a rather uninspiring little cafe.

But now that easily overlooked Cotswold stone building has been turned into an exquisite, intimate and perfectly presented restaurant with food to match.

Owner and chef Nigel Court was born and brought up in the area but took his skills to the London restaurant scene where he had four successful establishments.

The lure of the Stroud valleys proved too much and three years ago he bought the building and named his restaurant Alfreda's after his mother.

He and his partner Alastair Bull described the huge amount of work they had to do to make the building what they wanted but the turning point came when they tore down the suspended ceilings and found original beams and Cotswold stone features hidden by plasterboard and linoleum.

Now you go into Alfreda's and find their ideas translated into a reality which makes best use of what is a delightful space with soft lighting, unobtrusive music and calming decor.

When my daughter and I went there we were pleased to see a relatively limited menu, one which changes regularly we were told.

This meant our food, which is all cooked to order, arrived quickly.

I started with potted brown shrimps with rustic toast while Amy enjoyed baked goats' cheese wrapped in prosciutto with local pear and apple puree. Even the bread on the table was gorgeous.

Her Cotswold chicken breast with roast lemon, oregano and garlic on roast pepper and pigeon pea rice, was a revelation of taste.

I chose confit duck leg, glazed red cabbage and roast sweet potato with red wine jus and each flavour was separately delightful and collectively perfect.

I drew the line at the rich puddings offered and chose a selection of delicious cheeses from Minchinhampton's Woefulthane Farm. Amy couldn't resist the cinnamon bread and butter pudding with Bailey's infused cream, a real lip-smacker.

Neither of us drinks alcohol, and there was a good list of soft drinks, but Alfreda's has a well-chosen wine list with menu suggestions, with bottle prices starting from £13.50.

The bill, three courses for two and soft drinks, came to £57 – very comparable to far lower quality local establishments.

Nigel ensures as many of his ingredients as possible are sourced locally and his menus reflect the best of what Gloucestershire has to offer.



He also offers imaginative vegetarian dishes and, with notice, will alter a dish to suit anyone with special dietary needs. All ingredients are free range and GM-free.

Alfreda's is also open at lunchtimes from noon to 2pm, Tuesday to Saturday, with a cheaper but equally mouthwatering menu.

I won't just suggest you try Alfreda's, I'll beg you to go so you can experience the same food, service, ambience and value for money that we did.

Paula Smith

LOCAL FOOD HEROES

STEPHEN WHEELER, commercial manager at speciality food company *Mise en Place*, now part of Cheltenham-based Creed Foodservice, is responsible for sourcing the best food ingredients for top chefs across the country. Increasingly the demand is for quality, local produce

Mise en Place
THE SPECIALITY FOOD COMPANY



Rob Keene from Over Farm

ROB Keene at Over Farm Market on the outskirts of Gloucester has been pioneering local food for nearly 30 years.

He brought the concept of producing and retailing from a farm environment from America, where he travelled and worked before setting up Over Farm.

"Farm shops here had traditionally sold a few bags of potatoes and some free range eggs," he told me. "In America they had expanded the range of 'home grown' produce on offer, and bought in other locally produced food and drink, to complement what the farm had to offer."

Rob now cultivates an amazing 80 different crops from root vegetables such as potatoes and onions, to legumes such as broad beans and peas, brassicas, soft fruits, squashes, and even a sustainable crop of Christmas trees.

Crops though aren't the only story at Over Farm. Rob's family has introduced a menagerie of animals from water buffalo to pot-bellied pigs which children can visit while their parents shop. Ostrich eggs from Over Farm's flock of eight have been in demand over Easter. There are farm birthday parties, tractor rides to view the Severn bore, pick-your-own

and educational visits.

Rob is passionate about promoting local food.

"I try to offer something different from the supermarkets," he said. "Really fresh, seasonal food which is competitively priced, and an array of delicious local products from wine and cheese, to butchery and bakery – all from small businesses which wouldn't necessarily have a supermarket presence."

Rob has recently formed a marketing co-operative of several Gloucestershire farm shops called The Big G.

"Our joint aim is firstly to promote local food and each

others production but longer term I can see us co-operating on purchasing and other services," he said. "A number of us recently saved money by group buying our fertilizer for the strawberry crops."

Rob has the flexibility to plant slightly 'niche' crops which are always of interest to local chefs. I told Rob that finding English (let alone local) rainbow chard and spinach for restaurants was difficult.

Rob immediately said that he would plant some for *Mise en Place*, which should be ready for the summer trade. A great example of local businesses working in partnership.

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