



abundance in Suffolk. Just a bit smug, but true nonetheless.

Sommelier Lee has chosen the wines and there's a fresh Sancerre with the salmon, which the white wine drinkers say is just right. I notice several bottles of Pinot Noir deep-breathing on a side table ready for our next course.

Ashley Durrant, the joint head chef, arrives with the turkey on a huge silver platter and, to cheers and a round of applause, carves with speed and skill. We

question him about the food and he tells us exactly where each component of our meal has come from. For the meat-free (but not fish-free) among us there is grey mullet, all silvery scales glinting in the Christmas lights. Now, this could be considered something of a risk on the chef's part since grey mullet has a fairly robust flavour that's not to everyone's taste. Our non-meat-eating types love it, however, especially as it's well suited to the red wine. It's perfectly de-boned and cooked, served on a bed of julienne courgettes with turned boiled potatoes.

Our dessert, a trio of puddings, is a scene-stealer. A miniature Christmas pudding, dark rich and fruity, sits next to a tangerine chocolate brownie and mince pie ice cream in a brandy snap cup. All my Christmases have truly come at once, and my three beauties are gone in a trice.

We adjourn to a different bar for coffee and petits fours and by this time we're all in jolly holly mood. The petits fours are amazing concoctions of chocolatey

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richness and we get so settled in, chit-chatting and sharing stories that it's home time before we know it.

The Food Chain gang spills out of the main door and off into the night, some still wearing their shiny party hats. It's been a splendid evening, our Christmas party, and although incident-free, certainly more entertaining than the old Jules & Sharpie days of a turkey-for-two lunch then back to work.

What Christmas means to me
 "The annual challenge of trying to get a goose into the oven, it normally involves the use of garden implements"
 Jill Bryce,
 marketing manager, Hopkins Homes