

NEW LIGHT THROUGH OLD WINDOWS



With new owners, an extensive refurbishment programme and a bright vision for the future the last few months have been exciting for the team at Seckford Hall. **Adrian Rawlinson** visited the re-branded 1530 restaurant to see the changes for himself and sample the new menu

What's in a name? Well in this case the simple renaming of the restaurant at Seckford Hall to 1530 speaks volumes. Seckford Hall is without question one of Suffolk's most iconic buildings. A stunning Tudor mansion with beautiful grounds the Hall was constructed in 1530 and the new name reflects this impressive heritage. As soon as you enter the Hall it is obvious that the new owners value and understand the history they have inherited and operations director Mark Suddes is clear

that they consider themselves custodians of this important building with a responsibility to future generations.

With this responsibility in mind the refurbishment so far, in my opinion, has been skilfully executed perfectly blending old with new and moving Seckford Hall into a new era of elegant and comfortable luxury. Some changes are subtle such as the re-positioning of reception, sympathetic redecoration and the incorporation of the stylish 'SH' Seckford Hall logo into rugs and staff uniforms. Other

changes such as the bold animal print carpet in the Great Hall, home to the new destination Taittinger champagne and cocktail bar, are more striking but absolutely enhance the building.

With a programme to upgrade the bedrooms, the first ones are now ready and look fantastic, development of the facilities for meetings and a rolling programme for all aspects of the Hall no corner will remain untouched over the coming months.

As you enter 1530 the first impression is one of a well-lit, warm and comfortable space with



tables arranged cleverly to cater for romantic meals for two as well as larger groups. The old formality of the precisely pressed white linen tablecloths may have gone but the style and elegance remains. The restaurant seems lighter and airier than before both visually and in general atmosphere. Although we had arrived to eat early in the evening there was already the welcoming buzz of friendly but unobtrusive conversation from other diners in the room. This change in atmosphere was commented on by our waitress who told us that the refurbishment had already seemed to make guests more relaxed.

The menu at 1530 has been devised by joint head chefs Ashley Durrant and Liam Oakenfall, a talented and experienced team who are relishing the challenge of making the hotel a real destination for great locally sourced food. Uncomplicated in its presentation on our visit the menu offered an enticing choice of nine starters and nine main courses with a good selection of tempting desserts.

There were a number of dishes in the starters that really appealed to me. I was sorely tempted by the wild mushroom and tarragon risotto, pan fried scallops and Gressingham duck but finally plumped for the duo of hot roasted and local smoked salmon risotto. My dining partner too faced the same selection quandary but settled on the orange, fennel and marinated feta salad. Both were delicious, fresh and attractively presented. I was particularly impressed with my dish as the 'ravioli' had been formed using the sliced smoked salmon and was complimented perfectly by the caper and pea shoot salad.

For our mains we were again spoilt for choice. The options included three fish dishes – pan fried sea trout, steamed grey mullet and

pan fired cod - a trio of Suffolk pork, corn fed chicken breast, 28 day aged steak and a rack of lamb as well as two tempting vegetarian choices of beef tomato, smoked aubergine and halloumi cheese tart and baked Portobello

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mushrooms stuffed with mozzarella.

After much deliberation we chose the pan fried cod served with chorizo risotto and clams with a vermouth cream sauce and for myself the rack of lamb with roasted marrow stuffed with Mediterranean cous cous, broad beans and mint jus.

As the dishes arrived I have to admit that I suffered a brief moment of selection envy as the cod was placed in front of my wife. The aromas were enticing, the portion substantial and the instant murmurs of appreciation, as she tasted the perfectly cooked fish, made me realise she had made an excellent choice. I needn't have worried though as my lamb too was wonderful, skilfully cooked and the accompanying stuffed marrow a delight. The cous cous, which can often end up stodgy in dishes such as these, was light fluffy and extremely flavoursome. I have since tried to recreate this apparently simple dish at home and cannot get close. A testament to how those with talent can make the difficult look simple and create a dish that I know I will have to make a return visit to enjoy again.

For dessert I chose grilled pineapple with

gingerbread, deep fried coconut ice cream and caramel sauce with our other choice being strawberry Swiss roll served with raspberry bavaois and black pepper ice cream. At the risk of being repetitive both were again

delicious and our only criticism was that after such plentiful starters and mains the desserts too were generous, however as I recall that both plates were fully emptied I think our protestation was born more of feigned self-restraint than any real disappointment to be presented with such fantastic dishes.

Throughout the evening the service we received was friendly, courteous and knowledgeable. Mark Suddes has retained many of the team that were at Seckford when he arrived and that continuity is to be applauded as Seckford Hall has always had a reputation for good service. What is clear though is that he has enthused the team with a vision of the new direction for Seckford Hall which culminated in a thoroughly enjoyable evening and one that will we will certainly repeat. ■

INFORMATION

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