

ART AND ARTISTRY IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

THE LAKE DISTRICT IS NOT JUST FOR SUMMER. LACE UP YOUR HIKING BOOTS, DON A WARM JACKET AND EXPERIENCE THE OFF-SEASON BEAUTY AND SEASONAL PRODUCE OF THIS PASTORAL WONDERLAND. GISELLE WHITEAKER CHECKS IN TO LINTHWAITE HOUSE.

Sheep pause in their grazing as we pass, stark white woollen balls against deep green fields. Aged drystone walling carves the countryside into haphazard shapes that fit together like a jigsaw. The trees may have lost their leaves to the cold weather, but the sun is shining, bringing a crisp light that looks warm from the comfort of the car. It is only when we pull up at Linthwaite House outside Bowness-on-Windermere in the Lake District that we feel the chill in the air. Nothing, though, can detract from the pleasure we are taking in being away for the weekend.

Linthwaite House is a country house hotel that is part of the Leeu Collection, as emphasised by the lion sculptures, the symbol of the Leeu Collection brand, that welcome guests to the long driveway winding into the property. This is far from being the only art in the grounds. There are numerous works dotted across the 14 acres of established gardens and private woodland. I'm looking forward to an art stroll in the morning. For now, I'm content with the pieces I spot on the way to the entrance: a dog captured at play; an elongated couple on a skeletal carriage; a rabbit in cricket whites; a frog proffering

a flower. Each discovery builds up a picture of levity, a certain sense of quirkiness that sets this hotel apart.

Inside, the art display continues. We admire a framed deconstructed typewriter on the way to our room, a pair of oversized, colourful, 3D faces square off around the corner from each other, tribal masks are scattered along the corridor. It's part hotel, part gallery, modern art meets hilltop hideaway.

Nothing, though, is quite as visually spectacular as the view from our room, which looks past the conservatory bar, over manicured gardens and down to Windermere. It's one of those views that stops you blinking, in case you miss something as the light changes to signal the end of day.

The room matches the hues through the window, with muted grey-green and natural tones, paired with crisp white linen and velvet armchairs. It's warm and cosy, inviting us to linger. The only thing that drags us away is the thought of a pre-dinner aperitif in the rather swanky bar, which is linked



Linthwaite House



Conservatory bar

to the conservatory. Here, the colours are deeper, more opulent, textures and forms colliding. Despite being a room with the wow factor, it's a relaxed space. Sinking into comfortable armchairs, we start noticing the small things: the unusual legs on the coffee table that twist to a point like a ballerina; a glass hare; the majestic Brahman Bull oil painting overlooking our corner of the room. Guided by an attentive mixologist, we sip on exquisite cocktails, whetting our palates for the meal to follow.

I'm looking forward to seeing what's on the menu at the hotel's informal, yet elegant, restaurant, Henrock. With Simon Rogan taking the helm as Chef/ Patron towards the end of 2019, I'm expecting good things. Rogan's restaurants currently hold five Michelin stars between them, so that bodes well, as does the produce used here, much of which comes from Rogan's "Our Farm" located a few miles away in the Cartmel Valley.



Henrock restaurant

You know you're in for a treat when even the butter is something different. Think rich beef and onion and fermented carrot butter to waken the palate. What follows is a symphony of flavour: melt-in-the-mouth beef tartare with egg yolk jam and an oyster cracker on the side; intensely smoky confit middle white pork; mouthwatering Goosnargh guinea fowl and Our Farm beetroot; and tender aged Dexter beef short rib with caramelised celeriac and spiced date emulsion. We top it all off by sharing a beautifully tangy Key lime pie and banana bread. The latter may have become a lockdown staple, but no matter how moist your loaf, Henrock does it better.



Beef tartare with egg yolk jam



Goosnargh guinea fowl with beetroot, ponzu, rye and lovage



Aged Dexter short rib with caramelised celeriac and spiced date emulsion



Key lime pie



Banana bread



Lake Windermere

The next morning, after watching a smudge of pink along the horizon drift into a blue sky, we start walking off some of our Henrock indulgences. Our goal is to make our way to the top of Brant Fell, a nearby hill recognised in Wainwright's book *The Outlying Fells of Lakeland* as having a "fine prospect of Windermere". That it does. The views over the lake are spectacular on a crisp winter's day, worth every slightly muddy step. We descend via Post Knott and onwards through woodland into Bowness, where we browse the shops and admire the lake.

Coronavirus restrictions have halted the boats that usually chug around the lake and the swans seem bemused by the lack of visitors. It's peaceful, though, and calm, its still beauty unmarked by the bustle of tourists.

Returning to Linthwaite House, we tour the grounds, zigzagging around the artworks. I am particularly taken by *Sit* by South African artist Angus Taylor. The haunched figure is positioned on the terrace overlooking the gardens. Below, *Wild Albert* by Cornwall native William Peers stands among the wildflowers in the meadow, sheep grazing around the Italian marble frame. Behind the boules piste, a tiger strides along the edge of the embankment, a powerful piece by another South African, Dylan Lewis.

When the light fades, we freshen up and drive 15 minutes around the lake to Ambleside. We are keen to sample more of the fare Cumbria has to offer and Kysty seems the ideal place for it. The sister restaurant to Michelin-starred The Old Stamp House, the name Kysty comes from an old Cumbrian



Brant Fell



Sit by Angus Taylor

dialect; it is an adjective meaning “to be overly discerning about one’s food.” This bodes well for the eatery, with its minimalist décor and casual vibe.

The laissez faire atmosphere does not extend to the food, where every detail is pure perfection, beginning with the amuse bouche, an intriguing combination of black pudding with pickled apple and Cumberland sausage. I could eat a plateful of it. But then I’d have to forgo the Morecambe Bay shrimp, contained within a circle of curried cauliflower velouté – and that would be a tragedy. My dining companion is delighted with his choice, black pudding making another appearance, but this time with partridge breast, piquant pickled redcurrant, beetroot and hazelnut.

The main courses are equally as impressive. The pink lamb rump with breaded salsify, sour onion, mint and anchovy emulsion and red wine sauce is beautifully balanced, the complex flavours fusing together delightfully. With more hens than a popular Christmas carol, the combination of guinea hen, chicory, hen of the wood, swede and guinea hen sauce is a revelation, the guinea hen and hen of the wood mushroom sharing the starring role.

The desserts are a tale of contrasting flavours. The gingerbread cheesecake with pineapple, passion fruit and mango sorbet is light and tangy, while the decadent chocolate delice with tangerine, mandarin sorbet and white chocolate ganache is deep, dark and silky. These procure deep sighs of satisfaction from the depths of our being.

Rosy-cheeked, warm from the inside out, we duck back into the cold night air and return to Linthwaite House. Cosied up, we feel lucky. This short break will sustain us through the restrictions to come, and then we’ll be back to see how the Lake District changes with the seasons. In the meantime, we’ve heard Simon Rogan delivers.



Partridge breast, pickled redcurrant, beetroot and hazelnut



Chocolate delice, tangerine, mandarin sorbet and white chocolate ganache

INFO

To learn more about Linthwaite House or the Leeu Collection’s international properties, see www.leeucollection.com

For details on Henrock, see www.henrock.co.uk

For information on Kysty, see www.kysty.co.uk

To arrange a three-course meal by Simon Rogan delivered to your door, see simonroganathome.co.uk



Guinea hen, chicory, hen of the wood, swede and guinea hen sauce



Lamb rump, salsify, sour onion, mint and anchovy emulsion



Morecambe Bay shrimp, saffron oil, curried cauliflower velouté.



Gingerbread cheesecake with pineapple, passion fruit and mango sorbet