



Photogenic  
**FARE**

MULBERRY RESTAURANT AT THE MANOR HOUSE HOTEL IN MORETON-IN-MARSH IS A STAR ON THE FOODIE SCENE. GISELLE WHITEAKER DISCOVERS WHY

IMAGE: The facade of Manor House Hotel

“I don’t think this is Michelin-starred, but it should be,” I overhear a guest commenting about the two AA Rosette Mulberry Restaurant as I sit with an aperitif in the Beagle Bar, part of The Manor House Hotel in Moreton-in-Marsh. This is one in a collection of eight character-packed, historic hotels that forms Cotswolds Inns and Hotels, who focus on magnificent country house hotels within the picturesque landscape of the Cotswolds countryside.

The Manor House Hotel is just that: a 16th-century manor house. Upstairs it’s all delightfully quirky rabbit-warren passages that give away its heritage, leading to lovely, light-filled rooms. Downstairs, the catchword is warm. Although there’s no open fire in the bar – there’s one crackling in the library and another in the reception area – the cosy ambience makes it feel like there is.

In the dining room, slender candles burn on every table, casting a golden glow. Variations of classic tunes are being crooned in the background and impressionist-style images of cows watch over the tables. I’m glad I haven’t ordered the beef. I’ve opted for the four-course menu and spent a long time examining the tempting offerings to determine my first two courses.

Georgia is attending my table and delivers warm, crusty bread rolls, made on site, to tide me over. In a flash, she’s back with the amuse bouche; a sorrel panna cotta with red pepper relish. It’s almost too pretty to eat, but the flavours match the visual appeal, the relish adding a hint of sweetness to the velvety panna cotta that alerts my taste-buds that there’s a feast to come.

I’ve selected the goats cheese starter, which is a particularly photogenic dish. A dark maroon dehydrated pear stands sentinel over a generous disc of goats cheese, accompanied by sliced apple and grapes and a coating of walnut granola on a dark plate. Not only are the flavours superbly complementary, but the juxtaposition of textures is tantalising – the pear is smooth; the cheese creamy; the granola is chewy and the apple has an unusual grain. The dish is grounded with a drizzle of port sauce.

The main course of Sea Bream, the trio of fillets perched on orbs of Parmesan gnocchi, drizzled with crab bisque and bisque foam, with a spring onion stem providing a burst of colour, is simple yet delectable. Of special note is the crispy skin, which provides an appealing crunch paired with the soft fish flesh. This is the kind of food you eat slowly, savouring every mouthful.

After a suitable break to allow for digestion, Georgia delivers the dessert menu and I am faced with another difficult decision, settling on the blackberry and rhubarb parfait. She returns within moments. “We have pre-dessert also,” she says, confirming that this is a restaurant that shares my views on food. She places a rectangle of caramel mousse on the table, which is decorated with a dollop of chunky green apple sauce and a poppy-seed twill. My taste buds have been told: it’s now time for sweets.

The parfait is stunning. Served on a long, rectangular, white plate, a smear of deep rose colour skids along the centre, framing the creamy parfait, which is served with a smattering of reddish-purple blackberries, bright pink rhubarb, cream-cloured apple sponge cubes and golden honeycomb. It’s an edible work of art, pleasing to both the palate and the eye.

For more information on Mulberry Restaurant and The Manor House Hotel, see: [www.cotswold-inns-hotels.co.uk/the-manor-house-hotel](http://www.cotswold-inns-hotels.co.uk/the-manor-house-hotel).



ABOVE:  
Goats cheese with grapes, walnut granita, pear and port

I am too full to partake in the petit fours, but I can’t resist them outright. Instead, I return to my room with an oblong plate cradling cubes of cranberry and milk chocolate fudge, mango jelly, and white chocolate and lemon fudge.

On reflection, I disagree with the patron in the bar. The Mulberry Restaurant doesn’t deserve a Michelin star. It is worthy of two: excellent cooking, worth a detour.



ABOVE TOP:  
Sea Bream with Parmesan gnocchi, spring onion, and crab bisque

ABOVE BOTTOM:  
Rhubarb and blackberry parfait with honeycomb and apple sponge