



The taste of Perfection

Oli Martin, Head Chef of Hipping Hall in Lancashire is only in his mid-twenties, but he's cooking up a storm. Giselle Whiteaker chats with the chef about local produce, vinegar and inspiration.

Pork belly, langoustine, barbecued beetroot and gooseberries

You're from Lancashire and that's where Hipping Hall is located. Is there something special about Lancashire produce?

Yes, absolutely. Not just Lancashire produce though, because we're sort of on the border of Cumbria and Yorkshire too. If you drive in a five-mile radius you'll go through all three counties, so it's not just about Lancashire produce, it's about sourcing locally. If the Cumbrian beef is better than the Lancashire beef and it's still just down the road, why would I use the Lancashire one? There are a lot of fantastic producers in Lancashire, though. We have such a vast choice of things.

Do you have any favourite produce to deal with?

I love everything food-related. It really is my passion. Just this morning we were down at our Lancashire veg supplier and we got to go around the warehouse and that was really interesting – to see all the produce and how they store it and quality control, trying everything and seeing things that you might have forgotten about. It gives you inspiration for dishes.

Where else do you get your inspiration from?

Looking at animals' environments is important, if it's an animal-based dish, and going back to the original roots of things – if something is grown together, like people say lovage and rhubarb should be grown next to each other – things like that, I try and create dishes around that marriage of things. I think I've always been quite a creative person, so it's never a hardship.

Is creativity at the core of being a chef?

You have to be creative, especially nowadays. You can go on Twitter and see someone's created something, but really a lot of the time they've just taken someone else's recipe and made a worse version of it. It hasn't got the story or the love of the creator. [The original] might be specifically based around a tomato that's grown next door and if you use a tomato grown next door to you, it's not going to be the same thing. Nowadays it's quite hard work to be unique, but it's about finding the balance between things.

Is there one thing you think of as a magic ingredient?

Vinegars are my killer. I absolutely adore vinegars and we make quite a lot of vinegars as well. We've just got a 25-year-old balsamic which is absolutely fantastic. It's brilliant, but you pay for it at the same time – it's 88 quid for 100 millilitres of it. I think vinegars play such a key role in dishes. You've got to balance that acidity. If you've got something really fatty, you need something to cut through it, or if you've got something sweet it's a great way to counteract it.

Of the dishes you have on the menu at the moment, is there one that you would recommend above all others?

I can't say there is, to be honest. Every dish I put my heart into and at the same time, the tasting menu all rolls on from each other, so you won't get something overpowering after a dish that's been subtle and things like that. I love all of my dishes at the moment. Everything goes through rigorous testing and trials, so it's hard to pick just one. Probably, if I had to eat just one, if I was forced into it, it would be the pork belly dish. It's quite a simple dish because it follows on from a complexly flavoured dish with stone bass and licorice, so it goes back to earthiness. It's gooseberries that we pick from just down the road, and beetroots which we get from the other side of the road, and pork belly that comes from Yorkshire. It's sort of a simple dish that's not a simple dish, as it's got Scottish langoustines in there as well. To look at it you think it's dead simple, but when you eat it the complexity comes out.

The tasting menu at Hipping Hall consists of canapés in the lounge and an amuse bouche of soft-shelled crab with carrot catsup, followed by seven exquisite courses, which can be paired with wines. Dishes range from a simple-looking avocado mousse with tomato granita and caviar, which dances a tango on your tongue, to a palate cleansing dish of crispy olives, consisting of olive oil ice-cream and caramelised olives. Other treats include a pretty dish of cucumber gazpacho, arctic char and chilled flowers and a meadowsweet parfait with blueberry and honeycomb. The tasting menu changes regularly, but Oli Martin's passion ensures that any dish presented is perfection on the plate.

To book your tasting menu or an overnight stay in the sumptuous Yorkshire Dales Hotel and Restaurant, see: www.hippinghall.com.



Hipping Hall's majestic dining room



Meadowsweet parfait, blueberry and honeycomb



Seabass

Brine

1000ml Water
 100g Salt
 100g Sugar
 5 Bayleaf
 1 Lemon Zest

Smoking Mixture

100g Dried Pineapple Weed
 50g Chamomile tea
 100g Demerara Sugar
 100g Oak Smoking Chips
 Blend all to fine powder in food processor

Cucumber Gazpacho

3 Cucumbers
 2 Green Peppers
 1 Bunch Spring Onion
 ½ Clove of Garlic
 ½ Green Chilli
 1 Bulb of Fennel
 10g Lovage
 20g Parsley
 10g Bronze Tip fennel
 50g Chardonnay Vinegar
 15g Salt
 10g Sugar
 2g Crushed White Peppercorns
 300g Crème Fraiche

Lovage Oil

50g Lovage
 100g Parsley
 50g Mint
 10g Basil
 200ml Extra Virgin Olive Oil
 100ml Extra Virgin Rapeseed Oil

Smoked Arctic Char, Cucumber Gazpacho, Frozen Flowers, Sea Herbs and Lovage Oil.

Arctic Char

Remove fillets from the bone, skin and de-bone each fillet. Make the brine and allow it to cool to room temperature. Brine the fish for 35 minutes.

To smoke the fish, curl it around itself and place in a lined smoking tray with the smoking mixture in the bottom, then cover with tin foil, place on a high heat for 4 minutes, remove and leave covered to rest for a further 8 minutes. Uncover and serve.

For the gazpacho, mix everything together apart from the Crème Fraiche and allow to marinate for 24hours. Process it all in food processor. Pass through a fine sieve and whisk in crème fraiche. Check seasoning.

Take a mixture of fresh summer flowers. I use Viola, Pea Blossom, Flowering baby Cucumbers and Nasturtium to complement the fish. Lightly wash and allow to dry completely on a j-cloth. Drop into Liquid Nitrogen just before serving and delicately pick out.

For the lovage oil, pick all the leaves and lightly wash, blanch in boiling water for 1 minute and refresh in an ice bath. Fully drain by squeezing, add to an already mixing food processor and slowly drizzle in oil. Once all oil is in, allow to blend for 8 minutes on full. Pass through muslin cloth slowly.

To Build

Smoke the fish and allow to rest. Have the gazpacho chilled in the freezer for 30 minutes. Place fish in the bowl, pour in gazpacho, add lovage oil, freeze flowers and add on top of fish, dress Oyster leaf and Seabuckthorn and assemble around. Serve immediately.

