



THE WOW FACTOR

MIDDLETHORPE HALL IN YORK IS ONE OF THE THREE HISTORIC HOUSE HOTELS THAT ARE PART OF THE NATIONAL TRUST. THE RED BRICK AND STONE HOUSE MAY DATE BACK TO 1699, BUT THE CUISINE IS UP-TO-DATE. GISELLE WHITEAKER DINES OUT.

The façade of Middlethorpe Hall in York is somewhat imposing, but inside, the welcome is warm, matching the crackling fire in the parlour. My friend Alex and I climb the cantilevered oak stairs and enter our gorgeous four-poster room, overlooking the south lawn. “Wow,” breathes Alex, admiring the antique furniture and fine paintings on the wall.

Shortly afterward, we enter the panelled dining room, ready to put the skills of Head Chef Ashley Binder and his team to the test. We have no doubts they’ll pass with flying colours - there’s a reason Middlethorpe Hall has twice won Restaurant of the Year in the Visit York Awards.

The menu presents a dilemma. Should we succumb to the delights of the tasting menu, make a selection from the winter seasonal menu, or commit to the a la carte options? The hand-dived scallops make the decision for me. A la carte it is, and there is a plethora of temptations to choose from.

The waitress returns, delivering an amuse bouche in two parts - chicken liver pate with port wine and orange jelly with a clementine segment and gingerbread; and gravlax with dressed cucumber, lemon pudding and crispy salmon skin. Both are melt-in-the-mouth delicious. “This is to die for,” mumbles Alex through the crumbs.

The scallop starter ups the ante. A large mollusc sits opposite a cube of maple-glazed belly of pork, a ball of crispy potato hash between, with dollops of fragrant satay sauce and artfully scattered coriander. Each morsel dissolves in the mouth in a satisfying burst of piquancy. Alex is delighted with his breast of home-smoked duck, paired with duck liver, sauerkraut, quince and Sauternes jelly, and all we can talk about are the exquisite combination of flavours.

"Would you like to cleanse your palate with sorbet?" the waitress asks. We nod, and two glasses of Kir Royale sorbet topped with blackcurrant are placed before us. "I could eat this as a dessert...daily," I tell Alex.

After a short pause, our main courses arrive. Alex has opted for the roast turbot with cauliflower, caviar and Champagne veloute.

"This veloute is so delicate it could float off the plate," he comments. "It's the perfect complement to the fish." Meanwhile, I'm savouring my rich loin of venison with pickled blackberries, parsnip, smoked potato and a haggis bon-bon, given height by two slender honey-glazed carrots.

All too soon it's time for the finale. The chocolate orange recommended by the waitress tastes like a deconstructed Jaffa cake, the petit gateaux topped with orange slices and chocolate orange ice-cream. The Yorkshire Rhubarb is a visually appealing dish, with bright pink poached rhubarb, white chocolate and a scoop of mint-green pistachio ice-cream topped with a white chocolate twill. It's light and tangy, the sweet chocolate moderated by the zingy rhubarb.

"Wow," Alex repeats, as we move to the parlour for tea and petit fours before bed. Wow indeed.

All profits from Middlethorpe Hall benefit the Historic House Hotels and the National Trust charity. To book a room, dinner, or an indulgent spa session, see www.middlethorpe.com

For other historic house dining options, here are our picks:



Eckington Manor

Nestled in the Avon Valleys on the border of the Cotswolds, Eckington Manor boasts a flourishing restaurant led by *MasterChef: The Professionals* winner Mark Stinchcombe, alongside boutique accommodation and a vibrant cookery school.

www.eckingtonmanor.co.uk



The Rosevine

The Rosevine, on the Roseland Peninsula, is a stunning Georgian country house hotel, which features simply cooked dishes, using what's in season locally. This makes the Rosevine one of the best coastal restaurants in Cornwall.

www.rosevine.co.uk



Ockendon Manor

The dining room of Ockendon Manor in West Sussex, with its sweeping views across the gardens towards the South Downs National Park, is the perfect setting for the classically French styled menu, using locally sourced Sussex produce.

www.hshotels.co.uk

OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT The exterior of Middlethorpe Hall

OPPOSITE PAGE RIGHT The desserts are visually spectacular at Middlethorpe Hall.