



# A NEW EDEN

Change is coming to Brockencote Hall. Tom Rochford goes along to see what's cooking

Something is stirring in Chaddesley Corbett. For some years, Brockencote Hall has been quietly minding its own business as a country house hotel. Like many of its genre, its look and feel has become a little dated. But unlike 'the many', Brockencote has a really great new chef, a dynamic new manager, and a firm date (January) for that refurbishment, when the pink, chintz and swags will be replaced with more contemporary décor and furnishings.

We're not talking about anything that will frighten the horses – what's planned is a sympathetic reworking, to make more of the Hall's rooms and features, such as the Italian marble floors, and lovely wood panelling. Brockencote is a fine, early Victorian house, set in some 70 acres. With its parkland and lake, it's a perfect pocket country estate.

We are welcomed by Dean, the manager. He is clearly excited at where Brockencote is going, while retaining the current loyal customers. And it is certainly pretty busy on the evening we are there, with a mix of couples, family groups, and some discreet businessmen.

But the food is the real draw for your correspondent, and we need only a little encouragement to try the taster menu. This is only available if the whole table opts in, and the courses (six of them) are not set out on the menu. I suspect this helps to give chef Adam Brown more of a free rein, with some pretty bold sounding



dishes. I am not sure that I would have chosen, for example, stone bass with oxtail cannelloni and hogweed from a menu. But it works. It really does.

The stone bass (wreckfish) is, I confess, new to me. It has a nice, salty crunch to its skin, and firm white flesh, like sea bass. And the oxtail, flaked fine and tender as you please, just seems to go with it. Don't ask me how,


 food and drink

it just does. I could probably have lived without the little bit of hogweed (tastes a bit like nettles, which I think only ever work in a soup), but Adam is a serious forager.

His passion is infectious, and he has the whole team rooting for herbs, fruit, wild garlic, watercress - even St George's mushrooms - in Brockencote's abundant grounds. Adam laughs: 'Chris, our head gardener thought I was mad when I rushed up and said 'I've found yarrow in the car park!' but everyone's really getting involved.'

Adam's cooking is deceptively simple. He shrugs 'I take four components and aim to bring the best out of each'. He has a wonderfully light touch, and if he isn't heading for a Michelin star at some point, I'll eat my hogweed. Our main dishes were pigeon for me and venison for my wife. Both were sensational. I know restaurant reviewers always seem to say 'everything was wonderful', but they really were. The pigeon (served with quince) was dark red and as tender as you would hope a good steak to be (and usually only dream that a pigeon could be). A real revelation. Adam sources his meat and other produce locally, and these were from the local gamekeeper.

He is very hot on using fresh ingredients, and the best of what is seasonal. My wife loved the fact that we were enjoying the full flush of their apple crops, from the cider bread we were offered at the start of our meal, to our pudding. Apples even found their way into her dish of Skye scallops with squid and wood sorrel. 'It doesn't taste of apple,' she said dreamily, 'it tastes of the sea. You know that lovely rush you get when you've not been near the sea in ages and get back in? That's what this tastes like.'

**Brockencote Hall, Chaddesley Corbett, telephone 01562777876 or visit [www.brockencotehall.com](http://www.brockencotehall.com) Brockencote is part of the Eden Hotel Collection. The Hall will undergo a three-week refurbishment in January, so please call to check.**

Having devoured a dish of exquisite little puddings, we quailed a bit when our friendly waiter proudly announced 'Pudding!' 'I thought we'd had pudding,' hissed my wife in alarm, as she eyed a toppling confection of chestnut and green apple mousse. But it was so densely appley, green and cold, she pronounced it 'absolutely delicious - light as air'.

The cheese trolley was good, and our French waitress talked us through it well. There was a range of English and French cheeses, beautifully kept. I particularly enjoyed a soft, fresh creamy goat's cheese, served with honey from the hotel's own bee hives. (The bees love the lime trees that line the Hall's drive, and produce a deliciously scented honey as a result). Even after all this, we could still move. There is a deftness and delicacy in the cooking that leaves you full, but not bloated.

The wine list is extensive, and (at present) very heavily biased to France, with pages of clarets and burgundies. There is a good range of wines by the glass and half bottles, and the prices are manageable. Not knowing what the tasting menu would comprise, we left ourselves in the hands of the sommelier, and enjoyed an off-dry Chenin blanc, and a good Shiraz, both by the glass. The refurbishment will include a more modern look to the wine list.

And now for the prices. The taster menu was £70 each, but for the more budget conscious, there is the Market Menu, at £22 for two courses, £30 for three, and above that the Autumn Menu (£40 for two course, £55 for three). There are no individually priced items, and you can pick what you like between the two menus. Lunch is a little bit less. Each menu has a small but well balanced range (three choices for each course on the Market menu, four on the Autumn). Pretty much every dish has an original twist or ingredient. But this isn't food that has been messed about with, or experimented with for the sake of it. It's just great - really great - food. ■