

Cooking up a storm



A new star chef is transforming the menu at the Lake of Menteith Hotel

WORDS CATE DEVINE IMAGES ROY SUMMERS

Just when you think you have the Scottish culinary scene sussed, in sails a bold young pretender to shake everything up. Mark my words: the fierce new talent that has berthed himself by the Lake of Menteith is set to make serious waves.

In June, Ian Fleming, owner of this lovely little New England-style waterside hotel and restaurant, pulled off something of a coup by luring the talented and impossibly young Graham Campbell as his new head chef. Still only 27, Oban-born Campbell already

has a Michelin star under his belt (gained at the Ballachulish Hotel in 2008, though confusingly it was shared with his joint head chef Ross Sutherland).

It's immediately clear that Campbell is steering Lake of Menteith into Michelin star territory. You can sense the change of direction here as soon as you walk into the restaurant – all white tablecloths, Villeroy & Boch tableware and brilliantly efficient young front of house staff. Wine corks are properly left at the table when the bottle is opened in front of diners.

The wine list itself is quietly sophisticated, though a flashy Francis Ford Coppola Chardonnay Directors Cut 2007 at £50 is sneaked in beside premier cru Meursault and Chablis, Margaux, Beaune and Nuits Saint George. Our mid-priced Bordeaux, at £42, was great value for money.

Campbell's locally-sourced menu is packed with on-trend touches, such as foraged herbs and unusual taste combos. Asparagus with caramelised pineapple, rhubarb confit with fennel sorbet, and a wild sorrel crème brûlée are just some of them.

Our meal simply oozed culinary confidence.

Above: A star in the making, Oban-born Graham Campbell has transformed the Lake of Menteith Hotel with his innovative approach.



A curried butternut velouté amuse bouche had a light yet satisfying consistency in just the right quantity; a drop too much of this could scupper the appetite entirely.

A starter of two large hand-dived Orkney scallops came with two arty streaks of black olive purée, and two of savoury white yoghurt. Partner fretted that this show of creativity might overpower the delicate flavour of the shellfish, but found that actually, everything had been expertly balanced to let the scallops sing.

I opted for the marinated ballotine of foie gras as it is one of the dishes that attracted Campbell's star. Served tepid, atop a disc of toasted brioche, this proved so smooth, creamy and delicious that I was convinced it had been blended with butter. But no; chef had soaked his Grade A French foie, supplied by Ochil Foods, in milk and had painstakingly plucked out its veins. An ovoid of bright green apple purée sorbet supplied the necessary acidity.

My seared pavé of West Coast farmed halibut

'With talented young chefs like this, Scotland has no need to fret about a lack of culinary talent'

was as pretty as a picture. A hearty piece of this dense fish, cooked so lightly that it came apart easily in large flakes, was topped by a large tortellini of scallop and set on a bed of emerald samphire to give it just enough saltiness. I found the tortellini slightly too pasta-heavy, but that's a small gripe. A visual echo of the samphire was provided by a row of perfectly round dots of fresh pea purée, and a cascade of tasty crab froth brought the whole thing together.

My partner's herb crusted loin of Buccleuch lamb proved another surprise. Four little tender pink roundels were paired with a slice of braised lamb lasagne, an innocuous sounding side which promptly stole the show. Gamey flavours filled the mouth almost like hogget or mutton; in fact it was braised flank of spring lamb combined quite brilliantly with a duck mousse.

A dark chocolate velouté, another of Campbell's signature dishes, was a stonking end to the meal. Like a small whoopee pie, it was filled with a liquorice root ice cream that somehow managed to stay firm while sharing space with melting choc. The coup de grâce was the salt-sweet black olive syrup lurking around the sides, a playful challenge to the palate.

With talented young chefs like this, Scotland has no need to fret about a lack of culinary talent. Watch this space – and catch Mr Campbell while you can. ☺

FIELD FACTS

PRICE: Three-course dinner for two with canapés and chef's appetizer: £76 without wine. Coffee and petits fours, £3 per person.

RATING:



Lake of Menteith Waterfront Restaurant, The Lake of Menteith Hotel, Port of Menteith, Perthshire FK8 3RA Tel: 01877 385258 www.lake-hotel.com

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Six of the Best - lochside restaurants

GLENFINNAN HOUSE, LOCH SHIEL



Duncan Gibson, ex-Arisaig House, is a fine chef whose French-inspired cooking is rightly beginning to be noticed. A good bar menu augments the à la carte at this child-friendly hotel near Fort William. 01397 722235. www.glenfinnanhouse.com

SEAFOOD CAFE, LOCH LEVEN



Chef Barry Moran produces some of the best seafood in Scotland – the huge platter is a thing of rare beauty. Simple, unadorned fayre served in suitably modern lochside surroundings. 01855 821048. www.lochlevenseafoodcafe.co.uk

GEORGE HOTEL, LOCH FYNE



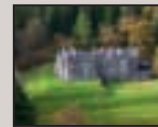
Loch Fyne is home to several fantastically good value easy-eating venues (try Inver Cottage in Strachur). The George is always busy and with good reason. Top food at affordable prices in a convivial environment, I'd unreservedly recommend eating here for anyone visiting the area. 01499 302111. www.thegeorgehotel.co.uk

GRESHORNISH HOUSE HOTEL, LOCH GRESHORNISH



Amid the many gongs on Skye, chef Mac Browning can stand proud. His classic cuisine is a mix of seafood, game and locally reared meat. If the food is conventional but very good, the views over Loch Greshornish are stunning. 01470 582266. www.greshornishhouse.com

ARDANAISEIG, LOCH AWE



Right on the loch, Ardanaiseig is a gem of a romantic country house hotel. Gary Goldie not only has legions of devoted followers but also a médaille d'or. 01866 833333. www.ardanaiseig.com

ALBANNACH, LOCH INVER



Lesley Crossford and Colin Craig's tiny Michelin-starred modern hotel serves the best of Scotland's larder and is a must for any dedicated foodie. This corner of Scotland has a wealth of great lochside restaurants, with Kylesku, Badachro, Poolewe and Letterfinlay all deserving a mention in dispatches. 01571 844407. www.thealbannach.co.uk

YOUR SAY

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