

You must fly to The Feathered Nest

What a foodie haven I have discovered. I had heard people praising this pub – but I was not prepared to be so totally blown away!

I refer to The Feathered Nest, a fantastic food and drink location with impeccable credentials that is worth seeking out, tucked discreetly away in the Cotswold countryside at Nether Westcote, between Burford and Stow-on-the-Wold.

It has made a big impression since its relaunch nearly two years ago, being showered with top hospitality awards including AA Pub of the Year (England) 2011.

With the arrival of head chef Peter Eaton – who comes fresh from the kitchens of one of my favourite chefs, two-Michelin-starred John Campbell, formerly of The Vineyard, Newbury, and latterly Coworth Park at

Ascot – The Feathered Nest's future looks rosy. So good was our lunch that it must only be a matter of time before the pub gains a Michelin star. I am tipping them for greatness!

Tom Kerridge has set the benchmark, recently achieving a second star at his Newbury pub, The Hand & Flowers.

The food at the 'Nest' was just as good, in my opinion, and it wins hands down for its far more spacious and attractive premises. I find the low-ceilinged Hand & Flowers quite claustrophobic.

Mid-December, the pub was a cosy haven from the storm raging outside. From our dream seat in the restaurant we had an awe-inspiring view of the rain driving across the Evenlode valley. Even in wild weather, the view was breathtaking, and I could imagine this being the perfect summertime lunch, dinner or weekend break location.

The Feathered Nest was bought by restaurateurs Tony and Amanda Timmer two-and-a-half years ago.

Having seen the potential of the old village pub, The Westcote Inn, they brought in the builders to do a complete refurbishment of the existing building – an old malthouse – and opened in May 2010. There are four guest bedrooms and the Timmers are planning to add more in an adjoining cottage.

"Having taken over a tired, out of character country pub, we set about bringing warmth and atmosphere to a soulless building – with gorgeous views," said Tony.

"Although a more polished affair than your average local, we place emphasis on making our customers feel relaxed. Many lead hectic



Denise Barkley discovers a fantastic Cotswolds eaterie where owners Tony and Amanda Timmer have created a foodie pub which deserves a Michelin star

lives, so when they take the time to drive down the lane to our sleepy village we feel they can't be in too much of a hurry and are here to enjoy the moment. We aim to help them to do this through the ambience, service and location of The Feathered Nest."

In April last year, the second phase of the refurb took place with the extension and refitting of the kitchen – allowing new chef Peter plenty of space to get creative.

From the moment we arrived at The Feathered Nest, I knew it was my kind of place. It has a rustic feel, but in a stylish way, and there are quirky touches such as the saddle bar stools, which are sure to raise a laugh. Ladies be warned, they are not conducive to maintaining modesty!

You can, like us, go down the 'fine dining' route, or settle yourself in front of the roaring



log fire in the lounge bar for a pint and a bar snack.

The restaurant is on different levels, which adds interest, and the two main rooms are accessed through an automated sliding glass door – it looks slick and it is a boon for waiters laden with dishes.

And so to the food. Well, where do I start?

From the basket of home-made breads to the exquisite petit fours, it was a gourmet feast.

I started with butter-soft, slightly charred foie gras with the bitter tang of braised chicory and an orange balm dressing to foil the richness of this most indulgent treat. Arranged prettily alongside potato fondant it was a feast for the eyes as well as the tastebuds.

Other starters included hand-dived scallops with ham hock, capers and piccalilli; a potato nest with vegetables and truffle and a slow-cooked Burford brown egg, or cauliflower cheese risotto with pickled and fresh walnuts.

However, my companion favoured an alternative risotto on the table d'hôte menu, a fabulous way to enjoy Peter Eaton's food at a reasonable £17.50 for two courses, or £22.50 for three. This was a pumpkin variety, enhanced by orange and cranberry, topped



with a crispy cheese fritter. The comment was “it tastes just like Christmas” and it was swiftly polished off.

After a debate over whether to go fishy or meaty, I decided on the roasted Cornish sea bass. The fillet came resting on a chowder of clams, chorizo and salsify, an inspired combination of flavours and such a pretty dish.

My guest had local wild venison, cooked pink but not bloody, sliced over bacon-studded cabbage and pickled russet apple with a chocolate and juniper sauce – it definitely got the thumbs up.

With manageably sized portions, we felt able to tackle dessert. Everything appealed to me – no mean feat – and another difficult choice had to be made. I hovered over the toffee apple

Christmas pudding fondant with brandy ice cream and custard, but finally decided on the hot coffee soufflé.

This puffed-up pud was just fantastic – with a walnut and pickled pear sorbet to temper the sweetness. My guest had an attractive dessert of pale green pistachio mousse, piped inside a chocolate tube, with pistachio espuma and oil too.

I could not fault The Feathered Nest in any respect, and I am sure that we are going to hear a lot more about this tucked-away treasure in 2012.

■ The Feathered Nest Inn, Nether Westcote, Oxfordshire OX7 6SD, call 01993 822021