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“When is a Restaurant not a Restaurant? ... When it’s Effings”

Extracts from article written by Peter Cave – photos by Lee Pengelly

If it's much more than just a delicatessen, and yet not quite a fully fledged restaurant, just exactly how does a food writer describe Effings, in Fore Street, Totnes?

Not an easy question, and one which is probably best answered by co-proprietor Michael Kann, who opened this highly unusual gastronomic establishment just over six years ago.

“My original concept was to bring many different elements of fine food together in one place – delicatessen, caterers, freshly prepared gourmet meals for customers to take home and serve themselves, a place to develop new recipes and ideas, and a place where people could sit down and eat different combinations of all these things”.

The choice of name may have helped, because work it did, virtually from day one. Although it may lend itself to several rather obvious – and by now well hackneyed – jokes, Effings is derived from the establishment's slogan, Fine Foods For Fun, even if the word 'fun' seems slightly out of place, with both Michael Kann and Head Chef **Nigel Marriage** taking the subject of food very seriously indeed.

“It all went at least as well as we planned,” Michael recalled. “The business side of things built up very quickly and we found that it was sociably very enjoyable as well. We've made friends of our customers and customers of our friends, so we're currently more than happy.”

By a strange coincidence, chef **Nigel Marriage** had also run a restaurant in New Zealand along very similar lines to the Effings concept. Returning to Devon, he just happened to be looking for a job when Michael & Jacqueline were looking for a chef and the three of them came together in what seemed a natural alliance. “You might say fortune smiled on us”. Michael said.

Nigel's credentials are impeccable. Classically trained in the French style, his first job was at London's prestigious Savoy Grill and he had his first experience of Devon working with Joyce Mollineaux at Dartmouth's Carved Angel, at the very height of its national fame. The most important period of his career, however, was working with legendary international chef Raymond Blanc, whom he freely acknowledges as his greatest culinary influence.

“He held a two-star Michelin rating even in those days, which was virtually unknown for a chef working in the UK,” Nigel said. “He wasn't afraid to question conventional ideas and say ‘why not do it this way?’ “That's what made him (Raymond) so great.”

Finally, and with some reluctance, **Nigel** left Blanc to go his own way and formed a partnership with fellow chef John Burton-Race in the early 1980's. Together they opened a new restaurant, *L'Ortolan*, in Berkshire, which they took from nothing to two-star Michelin rating. John Burton-Race went on to be awarded the Chef of the Year title and Nigel went to the **Culinary Olympics in Madrid** where his team won two gold & silver medals and the platinum award for the best team from 14 countries.

“They laughed at us at the time because we were all British”, Nigel said. “English cooking was still viewed with some disdain by the European establishment in those days.”

It was during his time at L'Ortolan that **Nigel** got to know comedian **Lenny Henry**, both as a customer and a close neighbour. When Lenny began preparations for his title role in the television sit-com “Chef”, he turned to Nigel to be his mentor.

“He wanted to make his work in the kitchen look real and professional, so I showed him how to chop and prepare food, that sort of thing.” Nigel said. “I didn't exactly teach him how to cook, just to look as though he was cooking.”

Nigel's cooking style is a mixture of European recipes, heavily influenced by classical French cuisine. His special ham platter, for instance, consists of Italian, Spanish and Tyrolean air cured hams, served with artichoke hearts or buffalo mozzarella and garnished with mostarda di Voghera. However, he insists on local produce from local suppliers wherever possible, and chooses organic when available. On the day of my visit, the specials board included smooth duck liver parfait with vegetables pickled in honey vinegar, salad and toasted brioche, salad of roasted quail, pancetta and quail's egg with crotons and hazelnut vinaigrette and an intriguing dish of smoked salmon and avruga caviar mousse with avocado and pink grapefruit salad.

To sample this mouth watering menu, though, you'll have to go during the daytime, because Effings doesn't open in the evenings. Remember my opening comment that it's not quite a fully fledged restaurant?.

Photos: Head Chef Nigel Marriage & Second Chef Karl Rasmussen
Guinea Fowl, Mushroom & Pistachio Terrine with Walnut and Apple Salad.