

5 / 2009

CENTURION

MAGAZINE



Deeper Luxury

Towards A Sustainable Future

Into The Valley • Revealing Ecotecture

Stuart Haygarth • Tree Houses • From Plot To Plate

QUINOTTO from the restaurant at Inkaterra



FROM PLOT *to Plate*



TEA IS GROWN in Inkaterra's own plantation



NATURE surrounds the Inkaterra resort



RAYMOND BLANC
students cultivate an
enormous pumpkin



"WHEN YOU LIKE SOMETHING, YOU WANT TO KEEP THE PICTURE AS IT IS,
FREEZE IT – THAT'S CONSERVATION" *RF TF LP FDI MO*

There's a new definition of luxury among discerning diners. It's nothing to do with the perceived rarity or high value of the ingredient nor the length or expense chefs have gone to in order to source the most exotic ingredients: it's a more elemental expression of gourmet. It's an acknowledgement that gastronomy starts with the soil. It's all about the immediacy with which produce travels from plot via kitchen to plate – ideally measured in hours rather than days – and often harvested from the garden by the chef getting down and dirty in person, offering an incomparable level of freshness and flavour, not to mention provenance and seasonality. Such micro-local dining adds immeasurably to the dining experience.

"Whereas even five years ago we doubt that many restaurant-goers knew what [it meant], now a full 70 per cent of London diners alone say they are actually willing to pay more for sustainably produced meals," says Tim Zagat, co-proprietor of the eponymous burgundy bible published in more than 100 cities. He says, "It's simply taken as read that committed high-end chefs should have their own private sourcing to reconnect food to its roots and customers to their food." Significantly, Le Manoir Aux Quat'Saisons, whose kitchen garden is a benchmark of responsible gastronomy, won the number one accolade for service when the 2010 Zagat London Restaurant survey was released in August.

Standing on the verandah of Inkaterra Machu Picchu, his luxury lodge, a former noble Inca retreat deep in the Amazonian basin, Jose Koechlin surveys the vast herb garden of native culinary and medicinal plants, still used by Amazonian and Andean communities on a daily basis with evident quiet satisfaction. As well he might. Koechlin is bemused to be identified as part of the trend for chefs to get closer to the source of their food. "It's

second nature to me to serve guests only what's endemic, seasonal and can be grown on our estates. It tastes better and, equally important, it's better for the environment. We're lucky enough to harvest our own ingredients from plot to plate ensuring we are naturally 100 per cent organic, we don't use any pesticides or chemical fertilisers that harm our ecosystem – and it's what we've been doing here since 1975. When you like something, you want to keep the picture as is, freeze it – that's conservation," says Koechlin. [It] "can extend to conserving gastronomy yet still being open-minded about new culinary ideas."

Koechlin is founder of Inkaterra, the still family-run Peruvian high-end travel company in the vanguard of using responsible nature tourism to fund conservation that has evolved over more than 30 years into a shining beacon of top-end eco-responsible luxury. Back in the early 1970s, Koechlin, a Peruvian entrepreneur/film producer, had been working on Werner Herzog's madcap film *The Wrath of God*. Despite the treacherous working conditions, Koechlin developed a passion for the rainforest and started looking for somewhere to set up an ecological reserve.

At root, Inkaterra's leitmotiv is preserving, protecting and restoring Peru's geography, nature, customs and cultures, benefiting local people and promoting better ecological awareness among travellers who want the experience of fully interacting with and understanding the fragility of the environment whilst eating well and staying in considerable comfort. "To me, one of the most accessible and appealing ways to really connect is through food," says Koechlin, whose wife Denise Guislain is in charge of the kitchen. They've only recently appointed a new chef, Peruvian Rafael Perez-Cambana, formerly sous-chef at Little Palm Island, in Florida, charged with taking the cuisine up a notch and chosen for his excellent knowledge of typical



Peruvian ingredients, from tubers – Inkaterra alone grows 400 varieties of potatoes – to Aguaymanto, a native Inca berry and pale orange lucauma (one of many indigenous fruits that is exceptionally nutritious).

At Inkaterra’s opulent properties the dining experience is, to express it in green terms, pretty much carbon neutral. Guests dine only on vegetables, fruits and herbs that are endemic and largely heirloom varieties, augmented with only sustainable seafood, supporting global efforts to conserve precious marine species.

Peruvian cuisine is becoming increasingly cutting-edge among top chefs worldwide and culinary heavyweights from Ferran Adrià to Heston Blumenthal have all been exploring and experimenting with South American indigenous ingredients. It was the hot talk of this year’s foremost vanguard culinary conferences: Identità Golose in Milan/London and Madrid Fusion. That a new generation of ‘explorer’ chefs are serving modern dishes using innovative techniques based on native produce, such as Amazonian herbs, to expand their range of flavour sensations, is, according to Koechlin, an incredibly exciting and positive force. “However, Inkaterra retains its own gastronomic personality, combining a mixture of simple recipes with a few nuances of avant-garde presentation which only enhance the freshness of traditional local ingredients.” Current dishes on the menu include a salad of lettuces, Andean cheese, duck ham, dried Inca berries and cornbread croutons in elderberry vinaigrette, lamb shank marinated in corn milk and Andean herbs served with native corn pudding and potatoes, and lucuma tropical fruit mousse with choco-piso syrup-dipped cake.

The commitment goes beyond mere kitchen garden, albeit on an Amazonian scale; not only does Inkaterra have its own avocado



Jose Koechlin and fresh Inkaterra tea leaves

“WE’RE SEEING A DIFFERENT KIND OF GUEST, WHO NO LONGER WANTS TO BE JUST PAMPERED” JOSE KOECHLIN

orchards and beehives, but it also has a small tea plantation, where the tea is hand-picked and dried for a short time, as it would have been two centuries ago. There’s a modest coffee plantation, too, and beans are roasted on an open fire. “The taste of both beverages is a revelation: profoundly different, completely fresh and a truly memorable back-to-the-source experience for our visitors,” says Koechlin with gleeful relish. “And, it enables us to create jobs and preserve traditional skills, benefiting the economy and the environment.” Travellers are encouraged to visit the tea and coffee pavilion, where they can fully participate in the crop: plucking the tea leaves and sorting both leaves and beans for drying.

“We’re seeing a different kind of guest, who no longer wants to be just pampered, but engaged, challenged and inspired both gastronomically and culturally by getting under the skin of the local community and seeing a Peruvian perspective,” Koechlin explains. They don’t just want more excitement and adventure, though Inkaterra offers plenty of that too, especially on its extraordinary 30m-high canopy walk, created in partnership with the World Bank and *National Geographic*, traversing the crowns of the treetops whilst treading lightly. “They want to be moved – it’s about wonder and marvel when you’re face to face with the essence of nature in the raw.”

Koechlin sees himself as an ambassador by default: “Of course, I would have liked others to have followed sooner in making sustainable practices part of their operating philosophy. But when one begins to put things right others do the same, which validates both the concept and action. Quite simply, I would like my life to be of value to the world and its preservation.”

Sudi Pigott

FROM PLOT TO PLATE AROUND THE WORLD

LE MANOIR AUX QUAT’SAISONS, OXFORDSHIRE, UK
Celebrating its 25th anniversary, and the busiest two-star Michelin restaurant in the UK, chef-proprietor Raymond Blanc’s vast organic potager is the benchmark of ‘plot to plate’ fine dining in the UK. Reflecting Blanc’s passion for Asian cuisine, it includes an extensive Asian garden. Blanc has recently had plans approved to embark on a full-scale eight-hectare farm adjoining the hotel, including orchards of heritage Oxfordshire apples “grown for taste and aesthetics”. ‘Garden to Plate’ courses at the hotel’s cookery school are phenomenally popular, explains Blanc, with his customary zeal: “The modern guest demands knowledge not merely pleasure.”



EL FENN, MARRAKECH, MOROCCO
Unusually for a boutique riad hotel, proprietor Vanessa Branson considered a potager a priority.

Located in the Ourika valley, a short hop from the hotel, guests are encouraged to visit and plan menus with chef Hassid based around vegetables at their optimum seasonal best. Reflects Branson, “The potager is a beautiful spiritual retreat as well as a delicious larder. It’s part of my mission to pamper with soul.”

FAIRMONT SINGAPORE
Opened earlier this year, five floors up the Singapore skyline, the organic herbarium complete with innovative wormery compost system is overseen by Prego’s chef de cuisine, Salvatore Silvestrino. It’s a towering statement in line with Fairmont’s worldwide Green Partnership programme, which includes high-rise herb gardens at other properties, including Toronto, Dallas and Washington.



UNCOMMON GROUND, CHICAGO, US
The first certified organic farm in the US that resides on a rooftop, Helen and Michael Cameron’s 9m-high and 230sq m plot arose out of a passion for ‘plot to

plate sustainability’. Not only do they grow heritage ingredients (from Nardello peppers to Black Prince tomatoes for the restaurant) and house four beehives that will eventually produce over 90kg of honey, but they also run classes for local schools to create awareness about the potential of urban agriculture.

SEAN’S PANAROMA, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA
Chef-proprietor, Sean Moran, constantly updates his menu to reflect the latest deliveries from his Blue Mountain vegetable garden. Favourites include Mexican midget tomatoes with incredible intensity of flavour and pleaches (a cross between peach and quince). “Being able to pull in new flavours, unusual herbs and leaves and older, rarer varieties of vegetables adds up to a different definition of exotic dining experience,” says Moran.



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PHOTOS FROM TOP: COURTESY INKATERRA (2), COURTESY LE MANOIR AUX QUAT SAISONS, COURTESY FAIRMONT, MURRAY HILTON