



Green... and red

The Scarlet

Aiming for an experience with a softer environmental footprint

Ben Tunnicliffe is struggling to contain his grin. He's a smiley chap anyway, but as he surveys his spangling new kitchen at the Scarlet Hotel it's positively beatific. There's lots to be happy about. Locations don't get better than the rugged north Cornwall coastline, and head chefs' jobs don't get better than free-rein in a kitchen at the heart of a progressive new eco venture.

The Scarlet is a stunning hotel. Constructed from glass, metal and wood, it's built right into the cliff face and, due to some clever architecture, practically every area in the hotel (including each of the 37 bedrooms) has views of the sea and beach.

Tunnicliffe is fresh from a year and a half off. Since selling the Abbey restaurant in Penzance - where he held a Michelin star for a total of five years - he's been spending valuable time with his wife and young son, and has just finished coaching the latest cohort of chefs at Fifteen restaurant, a few miles down the coast in Watergate Bay.

His kitchen, designed by Space Catering, will be the envy of most city-based chefs. It's a massive facility for an 80 cover restaurant, with dedicated areas for meat and fish prep, and even an area for polishing cutlery. Like a lot of new-top end kitchens, there's no gas, just induction.

The cooking platforms are designed to use the bare minimum of energy, and so is the hotel. "We want to leave a softer environmental footprint. Ethical tourism

Words
Joe Lutrario

»Where
Tredragon Road,
Mawgan Porth,
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TR8 4DQ
»Web
scarlethotel.co.uk
»Open
Every day
Lunch 12pm-2pm
Dinner 7pm-
9.30pm
Open every day
Closed for five
weeks after the
Christmas period
»Job enquiries
work@scarlethotel.
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THE BEST BIT

»The view, it must
be a contender for
the best in the UK

doesn't have to involve a teepee, there are things you can do to provide guests with a luxurious experience without making a big impact on the earth," explains Simon Baldwin, development director at the hotel.

It's in the service areas that the commitment to the environment really becomes evident. There's a huge room dedicated to the hotel's self-perpetuating (and extremely high-tech) natural ventilation system and, in another room, a wood chip burner that heats the water, supplemented by solar panels. Even the water in the swimming pool is cleaned naturally by reeds.

The directors at the hotel are keen to do things differently. The reception area has no desk to create an informal feel. "Hotels have too many accoutrements, check in can be a pain. We'll just show guests to

their room and get a signature," explains Baldwin. The only reason the bedrooms have desks is the AA Guide; if you don't have desks, apparently you don't get stars.

A big effort has been made to source materials and items for the hotel locally, and there's a near ban on anything from outside Europe, including wine.

Nowhere will the local ethos be more evident than in Tunnicliffe's kitchen. "A big part of cooking good food is the produce," he says. "Part of the skill of a chef is building relationships with the people near you that grow, rear or catch your ingredients. If you buy good produce you don't have to spend all day in the kitchen."

His approach to cooking will be music to the ears of people that don't go in for pomp and ceremony. "I get the best produce I can and do as little to it as possible to create something that's as tasty as it possibly can be," he explains. "I'm more interested in flavours than aesthetics. I don't know how to do half the stuff I see other chefs do."

For lunch, there's a set-price three-course menu for £19.50, running alongside an à la carte menu of a dozen or so dishes.

There's also a menu called Anytime, Anywhere. Available 24 hours a day, it can be taken on picnics and walks. Dinner is à la carte, four by four by four.

"I don't like the term fine dining, we just want to serve good food. I was never looking for plaudits at the Abbey," says Tunnicliffe, who was on holiday in Egypt when he found out he'd won a Michelin star. "I don't follow the guide. A friend rung us up and my wife thought someone in my family had died. I freaked out. I was worried about maintaining the standard. It took me two years of shitting myself every service - wondering if what I was serving was good enough - to realise that actually I got a star doing what I do, and that I don't need to worry about it. I'm not setting out for it at the Scarlet. I'm of the opinion that if you try for it, you generally don't get it."

Happily, he's under no pressure to get another from the owners and shareholders of the hotel, and he's adamant that none of the team have come to the restaurant because of the possibility of major plaudits. As he puts it, "I'm not after rosettes or stars. I want to put a big fat smile on someone's face and a warm feeling in their belly."

ON THE MENU

Starters

- ✦ Seared Hand Dived St Austell Scallops, Onion Purée & Peppered Satsumas £8.75
- ✦ Butternut Squash Velouté, Potato & Carn Brea Goats Cheese Ravioli, Rosemary Oil £6.00

Main

- ✦ Potato & Truffle Torte with Roasted Globe Artichokes & Chanterelles £15.00
- ✦ Roast Loin of Venison with Braised Red Cabbage, Parsnip & Walnut Gratin £22.00

Dessert

- ✦ Honey & Cinnamon Baked Quinces with Raspberries & Vanilla Crème Chantilly £6.50
- ✦ Mulled Cider Jelly, Tarte Tatin & Blackberry Sorbet £6.00