

All Menuwatches go forward to the judging of the Menu of the Year Catey

MENUWATCH



Seared lamb fillet, oyster mushroom, Serrano ham, spring onions

Ingham Swan

Inspired by the local produce of his home county, chef Daniel Smith has shaped a seasonal menu where luxurious ingredients are accessible to all. *Lauren Fitchett* reports

Tucked away in north Norfolk, a stone's throw from sandy beaches and surrounded by farmland, the Ingham Swan epitomises a classic country pub. Exposed beams and brickwork add to the ambience, and chef-patron Daniel Smith says people travel for hours for a Sunday lunch.

Smith has run the restaurant since 2010, building a reputation for what he describes as informal fine dining. Its menu is modern British with European accents and a commitment to celebrating Norfolk's rich bounty. "My ethos here is local and indulgent," he says. "We use luxurious ingredients, which have to be in season."

But it's not just a mantra – it's a code committed to paper, detailing his approach and preferred produce. "I have a document with my food ethos, and I share it with the team," he says. "It tells them my favourite meal, my favourite meat, fish and so on. We have to be singing from the same hymn sheet."

Smith isn't chasing trends – dishes are classic with innovative flair, aiming to make ingredients sing. "My focus is not to overcomplicate a dish," he says. "I want to buy the best

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Daniel Smith

ingredients, as locally as possible. Innovation doesn't have to involve a thousand processes. It can be simple processes delivered in a way which the customer understands, but which leaves them intrigued as to how you got there."

He works with two foragers for the locally sourced chanterelles that feature on the current menu, with winter truffles, shaved Parmesan and confit egg yolk. Samphire, Norfolk lamb, Cromer lobster and Gressingham duck also appear, thanks to the abundance of local suppliers, meaning the menu is always changing.

"We have the flexibility to change our menu every day if we need to," he says. "If there's a batch of fish we can use in a particular way and we want to for service that day, we will."

A handful of core dishes, though, always make the cut. "Fillet of beef will always be on there," he says, "as well as foraged mushrooms and scallops. For our desserts there will always be a soufflé – at the minute it's a toffee apple, but in summer it will be a fruity one."

Beef fillet in particular – whether yeast and thyme-glazed or charred with king



Frozen lime parfait, lemon verbena cream, meringue, Champagne jus



Peach melba, crème fraîche ripple ice-cream, raspberry cream



Barbecue fillet of beef, potato terrine, baked red onion, pancetta



Daniel Smith



oyster mushrooms – has become the Swan’s calling card. “It’s 50% of our sales,” Smith, who appeared on BBC Two’s *Great British Menu*, says. “It’s luxury, extravagant – few people use fillet of beef at home. If people want to treat themselves, it’s perfect.”

But the level of demand makes buying local more of a challenge. “We can’t always guarantee we can do that locally because of the quantities, so we do have to go to the commercial market,” he says, “but garnishes will be local. With chicken and fish, for example, we can be more selective.”

His drive for luxury was tested in 2020, when the pandemic forced chefs to change their approach. The Ingham Swan and its sister restaurant the Wildebeest, based near Norwich, launched £35 three-course at-home menus, featuring dishes such as lobster and cod fillet. “It was restaurant-quality food but it was no washing up, no work,” he says. “It was for people who wanted a treat, but we made it accessible. It was very popular, very quickly.”

Covid hit almost exactly one year after the Swan reopened from an 18-month closure

From the menu

Starter

- Sautéed locally foraged chanterelle mushrooms, winter truffle, shaved Parmesan, confit egg yolk **£13.50**
- Pan-seared hand-dived scallops, crispy pork belly, cauliflower purée, apple, jus **£16.50**
- Smoked salmon, pickled radish, brown shrimp, parsley aioli **£12.50**

Main

- Yeast and thyme-glazed beef fillet, dauphinoise, baby spinach, pancetta, sautéed girolles, broccoli purée, jus **£37**
- Roasted beetroot and cauliflower, purée potato, spinach, apple, walnut, chimichurri, tahini **£19.50**

Dessert

- Hot blackberry soufflé, blackberry sorbet, almond crumb **£11**

forced by a devastating electrical fire, which started in a fridge and ripped through the 14th-century building.

At the time, Smith said there were “no words” for how he felt, but in 2019 the pub was reborn with a contemporary revamp, met with, he says, a “phenomenal” reaction. Today, it blends cosy village pub with Michelin-featured fine dining.

Its du jour menu, two courses for £23 or three for £28, is a gateway for people to see what both the restaurant and Norfolk has to offer. Smith may have previously worked under Galton Blackiston at Morston Hall as head chef when it earned its Michelin star, and under the renowned Michel Roux Jr at Le Gavroche, but when it comes to Nelson’s county, Smith knows it well – he grew up 14 miles away from the Swan and aged 12 began work at Great Yarmouth’s famed Pleasure Beach, turning candyfloss and selling ice-cream, setting him on the path to a future career cooking for crowds.

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