

Chef *in the* Spotlight

The Old Orleton's head chef Craig Clutton answers Jane Haynes' culinary quiz



Above: The beautiful Old Orleton Inn
Left: Craig Clutton

The Old Orleton in the heart of Wellington is a charming retreat, providing a comprehensive selection of vegetarian, fish and meat dishes in a contemporary restyle of a traditional coaching inn.

Prepared using fresh, quality produce, sourced locally whenever possible, the menus have a truly Modern British character. The Old Orleton is one of a very few Inns in the country awarded 5 Stars "Silver" by the Visit Britain assessors and 5 Star Associate by the AA.

Owners Pete & Paul Turpin-Ottley have been restaurateurs locally for 25 years and previously had several successful restaurants, including Au Pont de Fer and Oliver's Vegetarian Bistro in Ironbridge.

Head chef Craig Clutton, 39, has been with them for nearly seven years. Craig

wanted to improve his skills as a cook of vegetarian food and, in Peter, who had been chef at Oliver's, he found a mentor keen to pass on his knowledge. "We are still learning from each other," said Peter.

Their combined talents give the restaurant its quirky modern slant on good British food.

What is your earliest food memory?
Making sausage rolls & mince pies at my Nan's B&B in Oswestry. She was a professional cook and even at about 3 I was taught the joy of cookery.

Why did you become a chef?
Aged 10 or 11 I had three passions: acting, pro-football and cookery. Which should I choose, honestly? I felt that I was best at cookery so that's where I went, with no regrets.

What are your cooking influences?

I've met and worked with some great chefs during my life, a couple of them giving me a chance when others had not. These guys drove me to achieve my best, especially in my competition work. I was a semi-finalist in the Young Welsh Chef of The Year at age 17, runner up in The Rioja Sous Chef of the Year aged 22. The voices of my mentors still ring out in my head whilst I am working, especially Michael Caines at Gidleigh Park: "Smile Craig, enjoy yourself!"

Describe your journey as a chef?

I started at 14 on work experience at a bistro in Oswestry. On leaving school I went to the Wynnstay Hotel in Oswestry as Commis Chef and just over a year later to The Lake Country House and Spa Hotel at Llangammarch Wells, Powys. I gained

some excellent experience here. Then on to Dinhall Hall, Ludlow for a couple of years. The Old Vicarage at Worfield was next and from here I did some training at Gidleigh Park Hotel in Devon. At this time I helped set up the newly refurbished Plume of Feathers at Harley and moved to work for The Malthouse Group in Ironbridge & Bridgnorth. I am very proud to have been at The Old Orleton Inn for six-and-a-half years. I'm now passing on my varied experiences to the young chefs coming through my own kitchen. We run an excellent apprenticeship scheme; I have trained several new chefs who have gone on to achieve well. I think I have found my niche.

What would be your last meal?

I would like a Seafood Barbecue on the beach at Daymer Bay in Cornwall, with my beautiful wife, my amazing sons and all my close friends and family.

What dish best sums up your cooking style?

When I cook a whole fish, perhaps pouch baked with fresh summer herbs and vegetables, I feel that my whole heart goes into it; I can't resist adding that magic sprinkle of seasoning with flare as I close the wrapper. Then when it is opened, the aromas in the steam of lemon, thyme and dill...oh my goodness, Heaven! This epitomises my style of cookery.

Have you cooked for anyone famous?

Here at The Old Orleton we have a huge celebrity checklist: David Cameron, Anthony Wedgwood "Tony" Benn, Martin Bell, Jonathon Dimbleby, John Sargent, Russell Howard, Russell Grant, Sally Morgan, Dick & Dom! Tony Robinson, Alexi Sayle, Dave Hill from Slade... I could go on.

Your top tip for a novice chef?

If you're not enjoying your work talk to your chef; and if you can't, you're in the wrong place and only you can change that! ■

FACTFILE

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Recipes

Roasted duck breast dressed with quince, chestnut and marjoram on a pink pickle salad

Ingredients

For the duck

- 4 duck breasts
- 125g/4½oz quince paste (membrillo)
- 125g/4½oz chestnut puree
- 4 tbsp dry cider
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 lime, zest and juice
- 1 tbsp chopped marjoram
- few sprigs micro amaranth salad (or any fine micro salad leaves)

For the salad

- 24 small plump radishes (mixed varieties look great)
- 24-32 cucumber pearls (balls made with very small melon baller)
- 4 red banana shallots (standard red onions ok) sliced across to make very fine rings
- 2 large pinches sea salt
- 1 large pinch of sugar
- 125ml/4fl oz very good quality red wine vinegar

Method

- 1 Score the skin of the duck breast with a very sharp knife.
- 2 Combine the quince paste, chestnut puree, cider, lime zest and juice, olive oil

and marjoram and blend together to form a marinade.

3 Coat the duck breasts and set aside over night.

4 When ready to prepare the meal, preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4. Pan fry the duck breasts skin side down in an ovenproof pan over a medium heat and allow the skin to crisp and the fat to render out. Flip the duck over and seal the meat side. Do this individually if all four duck breasts don't fit in the pan.

5 Bake the breasts on a tray, with 4 tbsp of the marinade, in the oven for 5-6 minutes (or until cooked; should still be pink).

6 Remove the duck from the oven and allow to rest for three minutes.

7 For the salad, sprinkle the radishes, onions and cucumber with the salt and set aside for about fifteen minutes. Rinse off the salt and gently squeeze out any liquid.

8 Cover the radishes etc with the vinegar and sugar and set aside until ready to use.

9 To serve, dress 4 plates with the pickled radishes, pickled cucumber and pickled red onions and rest the duck breasts on top. Spoon a very light glaze of the reduced marinade around the duck and top with the micro amaranth.

Oh so simple coconut and almond flan with passionfruit cream

Ingredients (serves 4)

- 4 eggs
- 225g (1 cup) caster sugar
- 100g unsalted butter, softened
- 100g sliced almonds
- 1 cup desiccated coconut
- 2 tbs grated lemon rind
- 2 tbs grated orange rind
- 125ml (½ cup) lemon juice
- 125ml (½ cup) orange juice
- 250ml (1 cup) coconut milk
- ½ cup plain flour, sifted
- garnish with lightly whipped cream and fresh passionfruit pulp

Method

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C/350F/Gas 4.
- 2 Place all ingredients in a food processor and blend.
- 3 Pour into a buttered 28cm pie plate.



4 Bake for 1 hour until just browned.

5 Allow to cool, then chill for 1 hour in the fridge.

6 Serve with whipped cream and fresh passionfruit.