



# A Piggy Provenance

*A lot of restaurants talk about local provenance. Recently-opened THE PIG-near Bath lives, breathes and eats it. Giselle Whiteaker goes foraging*

Tucked in the folds of the Mendip Hills near Bath down a scenically winding road that carves through picturesque Somerset countryside sits THE PIG - near Bath, a 29-bedroom mellow country house. It's sister hotel, THE PIG in the New Forest has built its well-deserved reputation around its walled garden, while THE PIG - on the beach is making waves in Studland Bay, Dorset. Then there's THE PIG in the wall, set within Southampton's historic medieval walls. Whichever porcine accommodation you choose, you'll find something just that little bit different. The rooms in every hotel show distinctive character and flair, shabby chic, with a slightly rustic air paired with chic comfort. We're spending the night in THE PIG - near Bath and our gorgeous hideaway is nestled in the kitchen garden, fronted by a well-tended cottage

garden opening up to perfectly manicured lawns. Couples and families stroll across the lawn to admire the enormous kitchen garden, packed with sumptuous home-grown edibles. The smokehouse behind this is being loaded with salmon to be cold-smoked before being dished up in the restaurant, and down other meandering paths you'll find the quail coop and the pig pen. Ducking through the gate set into the stone wall, the relaxed air of this home-style haven is clear. Guests linger in the greenhouse restaurant on this fantastically sunny day and several have kicked off their shoes and are lying on the grass under the shade of the trees fringing the back yard. It's clear this is no ordinary hotel. In fact, THE PIG is quick to dodge the hotel moniker, considering themselves instead a restaurant with



rooms. And while every restaurant these days touts seasonal locally sourced produce, THE PIG – near Bath takes it a giant leap further. The menu can literally change by the minute, depending what the forager finds or which produce the kitchen gardener deems to be in perfect condition – and Head Chef Kamil Oseka wouldn't have it any other way.

Kamil's eyes sparkle with enthusiasm as soon as food is mentioned. Originally hailing from Poland he always knew he wanted to be a chef. "All the summer holidays I spent on farms, looking after animals, fishing, gardening, foraging, all this kind of stuff," he says with a grin. He's been with THE PIG for three years now, but this is his first stint heading up the kitchen. "I love it," he declares. "It's different. It's more about game here, about meat. I don't know why, but I love pheasant.



I'm also going to smoke ham in a minute, and on Tuesday we are having three of our venison brought over," he adds, launching into a list of ways he plans on preparing the meat.

It's not just about local here, it's about community. Kamil doesn't just order from the farmers – he knows them, their families and their stories. "There's one guy who brings the vegetables for us. He's the fifth generation on that same farm and they grow vegetables for us as well. If I want anything, they'll farm it for me," he explains.

Most of the produce is travelling merely a few miles down the road to be dished up, in homage to the 25-mile menu. Even the sawdust for the smokehouse – oak, cherry and apple depending on the meat – is local. "We work with one of the butchers who tries to bring everything from local farmers. Everything is free range and comes from around us. The trout farm is 24 miles from us and the fish is killed three hours before it comes here," says Kamil. It doesn't get much fresher than that. Apart from when it's dug up from THE PIG's own garden.

"I always have something from the garden. I preserve things for winter to keep me going all year round. I make a lot of pickles – two years ago Ollie Hutson (in charge of the garden) brought me 150 kilogrammes of courgettes and 40 kilogrammes of chillies. I have pickled courgettes, chillies, mushrooms..." he says proudly. Kamil works closely with Ollie, walking around the garden with him every week. "Every single night we make an order from the garden. We have a maximum amount we can take in one day so we can keep it going. We bring everything fresh in the morning and if we need anything we tell Ollie and he pick it and brings it over."

In a testament to what's happening with food here, the restaurant is attracting a good crowd despite being open a mere few months. "I work more on flavours and good, simple presentation. Fresh flavours and local, that's the most important thing," Kamil concludes.

Sitting in the authentically reproduced Victorian greenhouse dining room later that evening, fresh crusty bread in a basket on a table next to the garden-infused oil for dipping, we are surrounded by pots packed with herbs. Kamil wants us to try everything, so he's prepared a tasting platter with tidbits from across the menu.



Conservatory restaurant

We start at one end of the board with some pleasingly crunchy crackling dipped in Hunstrete apple sauce and work our way through a Madgett's Farm Duck potted-pate with Somerset rhubarb and ginger chutney, James Golding's home-smoked salmon, a dollop of grilled artichoke and Tor cheese salad, grilled Mendip quail and the humorously titled "Kentucky" fried local rabbit, washed down with a shot of mint-green garden vegetable soup.

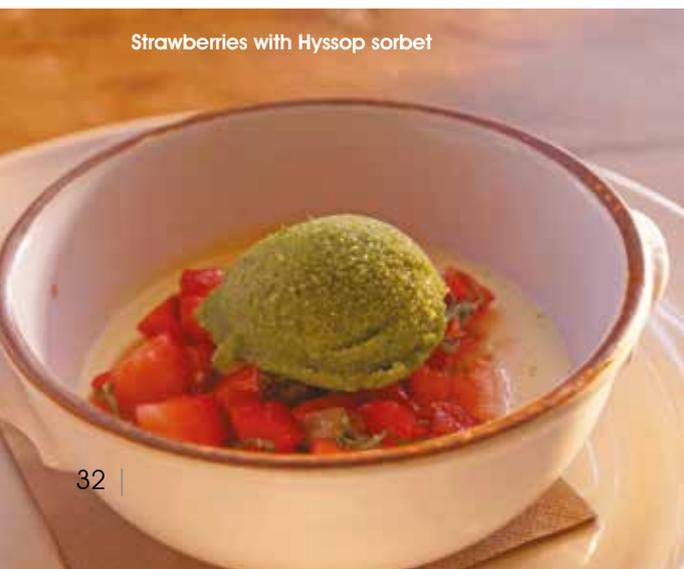
After a pause for air we attack the next section of the board. The lightly spiced crumbly black pudding balls are quick to disappear before we sample a selection of cured Mendip meat, each with its own distinctive flavours. A smooth home-made chicken liver pate and Hockeggs [a variation on Scotch eggs] are offset by the peppery tang of fresh garden radishes with garlic aioli, before we tuck unnecessarily into the final morsels. The slow-cooked pig cheek is decadent, bursting with all of

the best pork-roast flavours in a delicate mouthful and the Rosary goat's cheese and Heirloom tomato salad is exactly the way tomatoes should taste: phenomenally juicy and succulent. All the while we are nibbling on crispy tobacco onions – much to my surprise. I don't, as a rule, eat onions but these are so tasty that they bear little relation to their origins.

"If you're hungry, you can order more," says the waiter and we groan. Not that this stops us from tucking into the bowl of set cream and Somerset strawberries with Hyssop sorbet that he sits before us.

Just as we lick the last of the tingly ice from our lips, a herd of deer roam past in the field at the end of the garden. Content, we watch them frolic in the fading light. It's easy to see why THE PIG is such a success. With this food and that setting, how could it not be? ■

**For more information about THE PIG – near Bath or any of the other venues, see [www.thepighotel.com](http://www.thepighotel.com)**



Strawberries with Hyssop sorbet



Kamil peering out the window into the conservatory restaurant



# 'Kentucky' Fried Local Rabbit and Carrot Slaw

## Ingredients

Makes 2 servings

2x Legs of rabbit  
2x Shoulders rabbit

## Stock

1x onion  
2x carrots  
2x cloves garlic  
1x stick thyme  
1x bay leaf

## Carrot slaw Salad

4x carrots  
3x spring onion  
3 tbsps mayonnaise

## Panne (Coating for Rabbit)

350g flour  
50g celery salt  
50g smoked paprika  
100g chilli powder  
2 eggs

## Preparation

To make stock: Wash, peel and roughly dice all vegetables. Put vegetables in stock pot and pour in 1 litre of water to cover then season. Bring the mixture to boil, add the rabbit and simmer for 3 hours. Check regularly and top up with water throughout. After 3 hours remove rabbit from stock, leave to cool.

Pre heat fryer/pan of oil to 170 degrees Celsius. Mix dry panne ingredients together. Beat eggs separately. Dip rabbit pieces in dry panne mixture, then egg and then the panne again. Place carefully in fryer for around 4-6 minutes. Remove when the rabbit is golden brown and crispy.

Carrot slaw Salad: Wash and peel carrots, then grate. Chop spring onion, mix mayonnaise and season to taste.

Serve and enjoy. You are also left with a great rabbit stock which could be used in a sauce or soup.