



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

MENUWATCH



Monkfish, purple sprouting broccoli, onion, mussel cream

# Olive Tree

Chris Cleghorn's fresh approach to ingredient-led cooking has won Bath its Michelin star. *Vincent Wood* pays a visit

As is often the case, chef Chris Cleghorn was straight back at the pass the day after he was presented with a Michelin star for the Olive Tree restaurant at the launch of the 2019 guide.

Bath appears to be the kind of chocolate box city that Michelin would tend to look favourably on, but his kitchen in Laurence and Helen Beere's four-AA-star, 29-bedroom Queensbury Hotel is the only site in the Unesco World Heritage City to be awarded a star by the guide.

Catching up with Cleghorn shortly after the award, he explains: "We were kind of busy anyway, but now it's gone crazy – but that's all good, it just keeps us in the right direction. What we do is what we do – we don't differ from that."

Having started his career in his native Wales, taking commis chef roles at small hotels and inns, Cleghorn went on to work under some of the top names in the industry. Most significantly, he built his knowledge in the kitchens of Michael Caines – first in Abode Chester and then at Gidleigh Park in Chagford, Devon – over five years. From there he spent a year at Heston Blumenthal's the Fat

**"You should always be able to see everything that's on the plate"**

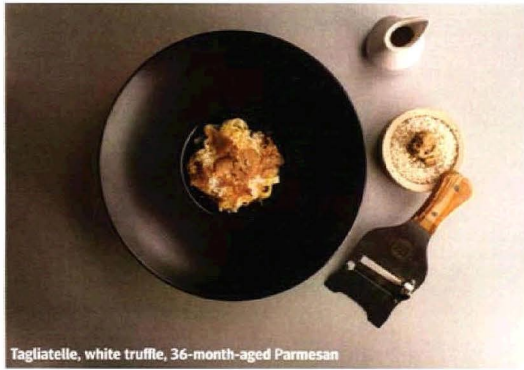
**Chris Cleghorn**

Duck in Bray, Berkshire, before landing in Bath at the Queensbury, a characterful blend of opulence and eccentricity with a three-rosette restaurant or, as he puts it: "quirky... with a luxury element".

Cleghorn has kept a steady hand on the kitchen to ensure flavour is king and ingredients are respected, but in the last year there was a switch in approach that he feels made the offering star-worthy.

"We've always had a similar ethos," says Cleghorn, "that the main ingredient being exceptional means you don't need to work as hard later on with it; that you should not try to put too much on the plate. But I think the main emphasis that we changed was a slightly fresher approach. When you look at the plates you shouldn't have to break it apart. You should always be able to see everything that's on the plate. It's about the clarity of flavours and clarity in the depth of flavours as well."

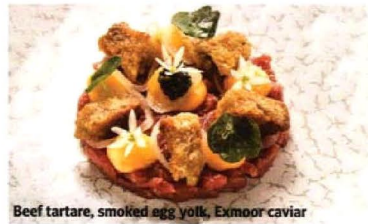
The clearest example is the restaurant's signature: an uncomplicated but elegant tagliatelle. Initially, Cleghorn put the pasta dish on the menu when the black truffle season



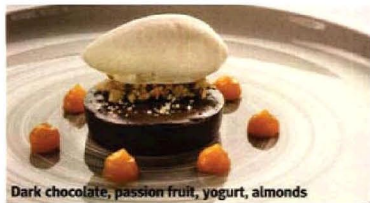
Tagliatelle, white truffle, 36-month-aged Parmesan



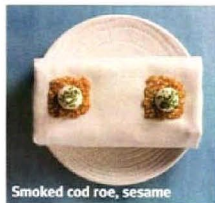
Strawberry, mascarpone, meringue, basil



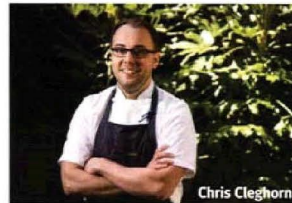
Beef tartare, smoked egg yolk, Exmoor caviar



Dark chocolate, passion fruit, yogurt, almonds



Smoked cod roe, sesame



Chris Cleghorn

began – but it soon became a stalwart. “We played around with a load of different black truffle dishes,” he says, “and in the end we found that actually the best dish was a tagliatelle with a good white wine sauce, baked Parmesan and fresh truffle.”

The dish adapts seasonally, switching between winter blacks, Australian blacks and white truffles. The main seasonal change for each is in the finishing oils – for example, a parsley oil with the white truffle or lovage oil with winter black truffle. “It’s so simple. It’s such a unique dish because it’s all about letting that truffle shine.”

The menu is also a testament to the kitchen’s willingness to adapt. The seven-strong brigade, with a peak of 55 covers for which to cater, offers a five-course and a seven-course tasting menu, both without crossover ingredients.

On top of that, all dishes are also available as an à la carte offering, while vegan, vegetarian and dairy-free seven-course menus are also available. “Dietary requirements are a big element of what we do these days,” Cleghorn says, “and we’re very set up for it.”

Provenance as ever is key – but Cleghorn is

### From the menu

- Raw Orkney scallop, horseradish, pink grapefruit, dill
- Tagliatelle, white truffle, 36-month-aged Parmesan
- Wild sea bass, onion, artichoke, lardo, mushroom tea
- Wooley Park Farm duck, barbecue cauliflower, sea beet, hazelnut, lemon
- Baked milk chocolate, peanut, brown butter ice-cream, salted caramel (or)
- Blueberry, mascarpone, lemon verbena, meringue

From the ‘Five’ menu, £68. Five glasses of wine to accompany the menu, £47.50

no purist when it comes to sourcing. “We use local produce as best as we can. If we have to source something because it’s not good enough locally, then we’ll go slightly further afield,” he says. “We just want the best ingre-

dients, so our lamb comes from Wiltshire, our venison comes from the Salisbury plains, but the best grouse comes from Yorkshire.”

The chef is also willing to look to less prestigious sources if it gives him the best result. A prime example is the smoked eel starter, accompanied by barbecued celeriac, celery, a coastal Cheddar cheese sauce and pickled apple, all lifted by a hint of lovage. “Guests will taste that cheese and think it is expensive – actually, it’s the most bog-standard cheese you can use, but it’s got a phenomenal calcium point.”

Desserts carry on Cleghorn’s commitment to clear-cut flavours. One of his favourite dishes, a dark chocolate ganache with yogurt sorbet, passion fruit and almond, is all about precision. “It’s a very clean plate,” he adds. “It does all the flavours you need it to do. I just love dark chocolate and letting it shine through – and the yogurt with the dark chocolate is phenomenal.”

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