

## Loyton Lodge

Other than the obscure diaries of a medieval vicar, the little village of Morebath in north-east Devon has never particularly had anything to distinguish itself beyond a rather lovely cricket pitch. That is until five years ago when Alick and Sally Barnes transformed their 300-acre farm into a luxurious country retreat with the help of their children, Isobel and Angus.

The buildings which they developed surround a courtyard and reflect their origins by maintaining the feel and charm of the traditional farmhouse or shooting lodge but with a subtle, contemporary twist. The main dining room is a converted barn with high ceilings and traditional furnishings and sits next to a more contemporary dining room with large windows, perfect for pre-dinner drinks and the last of the evening's sunshine.

This mix of old and new is also mirrored in the food, which is undoubtedly the jewel in the crown of this Exmoor retreat. Using locally sourced seasonal food including some from their own farm, Alick and Sally have applied the same values to this aspect of their work as they have done to their 40 years of farming. This means that quality, patience, attention to detail and respect for the local environment are paramount. The result is an authentic country fine-dining experience that is as good as it gets. Catering for all needs, from weekend house parties to corporate events and weddings as well as dinner parties, it is the perfect place to escape the hustle and bustle of modern living and to enter a rural idyll from which you will find it hard to drag yourself away.

We had a dinner party for six and started with locally grown asparagus topped with a pheasant's egg. Simply cooked and beautifully presented, it showed us exactly why asparagus is

often referred to as the 'king of vegetables' and was perfectly accompanied by a fresh Pouilly Fumé wine. This was followed by the most delicious, succulent and fully flavoured loin of venison I have ever tasted, and that coming from someone raised on Exmoor. Absolutely unbeatable and this time complemented by a noticeably rich, smooth Rioja.

We finished with a rhubarb parfait with lemon meringue, orange and raspberry in which each fruit remained utterly clear and distinct in flavour and once again had everyone wondering quite how the chef had managed it – and to answer that we spoke to the man himself, the obviously talented Nick Pyle.

He is a mixture of both traditional and modern, having been brought up in nearby Wellington before spending six years learning his trade just outside Paris with his wife, Bernadette, who also works at Loyton and who excels in her knowledge of wine. Whatever the occasion, Nick and Bernadette will tailor the menu to suit your specific needs. They also provide regular special events such as the recent festival of asparagus and the Taste of Sicily cookery weekend.

To round off a memorable evening, there was a glass of single malt Bruichladdich whisky, coffee and some of Nick's delicious petits fours in front of a roaring fire in the sitting room. For this we were joined by the extremely affable Alick and there was talk of past farming days

**Loyton Lodge, Morebath, Tiverton**  
**EX16 9AS ☎01398 331051,**  
**[www.loytonlodge.com](http://www.loytonlodge.com)**

**Opening hours:** advance booking necessary

**Proprietors:** Alick and Sally Barnes

**Head Chef:** Nick Pyle

**Prices:** £45 for three courses (includes canapés, coffee and petits fours)

Wine from £14.95 a bottle



along with future plans for us to bring a bigger group over for clay pigeon shooting and dinner. All in all this is country food made by country people to the very highest standards. Truly rural England at its very best. □ **TIM KEVAN**

### Starters

Dill-marinated salmon, egg, chive, pea shoots, caper dressing  
 Hand-dived Devon scallops, pea purée, smoked bacon  
 Tuna carpaccio, avocado, rocket, horseradish dressing  
 Home-cured bresaola, goats' cheese, baby beets, olive oil crackers

### Main courses

Lamb two ways: roast loin, slow-cooked shoulder  
 Whole-baked fish. The finest available day boat and line-caught fish – turbot, brill, bass, sole (supplement may apply subject to market price)  
 Roast breast and confit leg of chicken  
 Roast sirloin of Devon beef

### Desserts

Pimm's Trifle  
 Individual peach tartelettes, raspberry sorbet  
 Strawberry shortbread, poached strawberries, vanilla mousse  
 Chocolate torte, banana, rum, cappuccino ice cream  
 Selection of local cheeses (supplement of £10 per person)