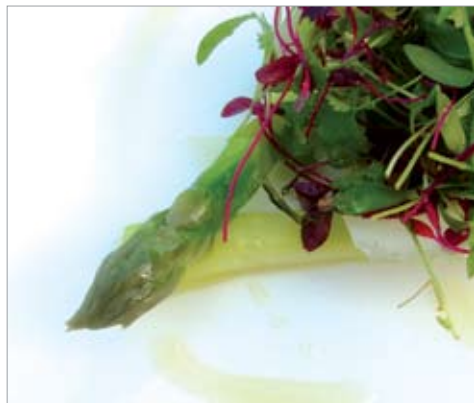


# MOONRAKERS, Alfriston

Three-hour egg yolk in a country setting

After a freak space hopper incident, a little euphoric on painkillers and my arm in a sling, we decided to keep our booking at the newly re-launched Moonrakers Restaurant in Alfriston. From what I'd gleaned about their food, it would be worth it, and it wouldn't be the first time I'd needed my food chopping up. Named for smuggling once rife in the village, the High Street restaurant has been recently re-launched by Polly Mockford, daughter of Sussex artist Harold Mockford, and partner, film director, Robin Bextor. The newly designed interior of Moonrakers is a delightful fusion of old wood and Harold Mockford colours, with panels of greeny-grey and rich purple. Many of his pictures are on the walls. Since it is a fine evening, we sit outside on the rear terraced garden, overlooking Alfriston village green and church. The wine list covers interesting ground. We order house red, Vin de Pays D'Oc Cabernet Sauvignon, at £14. The menu has intriguing touches, like pea shoots and '3-hour egg yolk'. Very modern for rural Sussex. It sounds like chef, Robert Harris, previously at Gordon Ramsay's Maze restaurant, has an interest in molecular gastronomy. Amuse bouche of Jerusalem artichoke parfait between crisp polenta biscuit arrive, followed by bread from Firlie bakery, served with a bowl of beautiful yellow and purple gloop, which our friendly waiter informs us is 'emulsified rape seed oil with beetroot syrup'. Ah, emulsions. Definitely hi-tech. We ask about 3-hour egg yolk and she explains that it is cooked in a temperature controlled water bath. Served with English asparagus and Parmesan salad for £7.50, my companion, a keen egg man, decides to try it. I recklessly order celeriac soup at £6.50 because I like the sound of the braised duck leg, red mustard frills and truffle oil that accompany it, although aware I may end up tipping them down my front. I opt for a main course of South Downs lamb with puy lentils at £18.50. Local farmer Richard Brown provides the lamb; from a flock that grazes at Frog Firlie. My companion chooses pan roasted scallops with confit Old Spot pork belly at £17.50. The soup is brought out in a white jug, and poured over the duck. My companion's asparagus and micro herbs are lovely, the egg particularly intensely flavoured. We enjoy the wine and the beautiful July evening before the next course arrives. My best end of lamb is very pink, served with excellent pancetta, confit baby onions and potato purée shaped in what look to me like the conical breasts



Photographs: Rob Reed

on a John Paul Gaultier bustier. My companion kindly cuts up my lamb, whilst I ponder how evil it would be to steal his crackling atop rings of perfectly browned pork belly. Slithers of courgette lie underneath next to mounds of 'white chocolate cauliflower'. I am offered a taste. The crackling is perfect, the pork divine. Our plates wiped clean, we feel a chill in the air and decide to go indoors to share a dark chocolate mousse and ice cream for £7.50, and a glass of Australian Noble Taminga sweet wine at £6. The mousse is naughtiness incarnate, and I love the crisp salted pecan caramel biscuit wedged across like a sail. It has been a day full of surprises, but the culinary ones have all been delightful. We shall return. ♥ **Emma Chaplin**

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