

Northcote Manor food & wine festival, Lancashire

4 Nigel Howarth and Craig Bancroft could never have imagined when they set out 20 years ago on the culinary path that has led today to the splendid Northcote Manor outside Blackburn in Lancashire that their signature dish would now be the definitive Lancashire hotpot.

But the resurgence in the popularity of comfort food, the increase in the quality of so much British produce and the regained pride of so many chefs like Howarth in our more traditional dishes have turned the culinary clock full circle. Today, Howarth's hotpot comes with oyster fritters (an original accompaniment in some recipes when they were cheap and plentiful), spiced pickled cabbage and glazed carrots. It costs £32 for two and comes with the recommendation that customers order it four hours in advance so that it can be cooked perfectly in Nigel's Aga.

However, from Mon Jan 26 until Sun Feb 01 Northcote Manor provides an opportunity for many in the north to sample less local dishes as their fourth Festival of Food & Wine brings together seven characterful chefs to lead the hotel's kitchen brigade.

These are New Zealander Peter Gordon from London's Providores; John Campbell from The Vineyard in Stockcross; Darina Allen from the inspirational Ballymaloe in county Cork; Rowley Leigh, Philip Howard and Giorgio Locatelli from respectively, London's Kensington Place, The Square and Locanda Locatelli and finally, Howarth himself.

Prices are extremely reasonable for the quality on offer - the five course dinners are £70 per head including wines other than Howarth's on the last night when the price is £90.

Bancroft relishes the challenge of working with his wine merchants to find the most suitable wines and, incidentally, recommends reds from Rioja, the Rhone or Portugal for anyone making Lancashire hotpot at home.

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