



Lucy Carroll at Bistro 21

LUCY CARROLL, DIRECTOR OF CARROLL'S HERITAGE POTATOES, AT BISTRO 21, NOTHUMBERLAND

'Chefs love our potatoes for their different tastes and cooking qualities. One of my favourite places to eat them is at Terry Laybourne's Bistro 21 in Durham. Chef Robbie Bell serves our Yukon Gold, mashed with various dishes, such as pan-fried pollack or duck breast. Bistro 21 is housed in an old farmhouse building, now smartly updated. It's only a few minutes out of Durham centre, in Aykley Heads, but it feels like a nice escape from the hustle and bustle. The restaurant has a lovely courtyard where you can have a pre-dinner drink in summer. The food is seasonal, produce-driven, very well executed and not overly-complicated – if you go at lunch (two courses, £15), it's very reasonable.

'When we started farming at Tiptoe Farm, we grew modern, commercial potato varieties such as Maris Piper, but we found that the process wasn't about taste or quality, just volume. At the same time, we were growing older varieties of potato in our own garden – pink fir apple and red Duke of York – so we could taste the difference. Eventually, we decided to grow these heritage varieties for sale. We grew one acre, took them to Berwick-on-Tweed farmers' market and our first customer, believe it or not, was Terry Laybourne.

'Now we grow 17 varieties of potatoes for chefs including Mark Hix (his Lyme Regis restaurant uses red Duke of York potatoes with its fish dishes) and Sat Bains, as well as for Jamie Oliver's Fifteen. Our most popular variety is probably the Yukon Gold. Chefs love the waxy flesh because it absorbs more butter to make a really rich mash.'

■ *Starters from £5.50; mains from £14.50. Early evening, two courses, £15. Bistro 21, Aykley Heads House, Aykley Heads, Durham (0191 384 4354; bistrotwentyone.co.uk).*

Carroll's Heritage Potatoes are reviving real spuds and transforming how chefs regard the humble tuber - you'll find them on the menu at restaurants such as Mark Hix and Jamie Oliver's Fifteen. Available online and at stores nationally. (heritage-potatoes.co.uk)

JAMES WRIGHT AND CHARLES ASHBRIDGE, DIRECTORS OF TASTE TRADITION, AT THE DURHAM OX, YORKSHIRE

'The Durham Ox is one of Taste Tradition's longest-standing customers. It's a dining pub with rooms in a sleepy village, and the owner, Michael Ibbotson, has transformed it into a real destination. It's very comfortable but it hasn't lost its old-fashioned charm. There's seating outside in the summer and it's got fantastic views over the Hambleton Hills. It serves a mix of traditional and sophisticated, modern dishes and gets very busy at weekends.

'The chef takes our Longhorn and Shorthorn beef for the restaurant's steaks, plus he uses our Gloucester Old Spot sausages at breakfast. At Sunday lunch, he also uses our porchetta, which is a boned suckling pig, stuffed with garlic and fresh herbs, then rolled and served with apple sauce, roast potatoes, Yorkshire pudding and seasonal, local vegetables. I tend to drink bitter when I'm up there – Black Sheep is another fantastic local product.

'All our pork comes from our own native, rare-breed animals or from dedicated farms that produce for us. It's a very old-fashioned way of farming as these breeds won't fit into an intensive rearing system. Modern pig breeds give



Charles Ashbridge at The Durham Ox

you lean, pale, wet meat that has had the flavour bred out of it; rare-breed pork is much dryer and has a good covering of fat which gives it loads of flavour. And it's only a few pence more per kilo.

'These days, we supply some of the country's best restaurants, including Fergus Henderson's St John, Jamie Oliver's Fifteen and Theo Randall at The Intercontinental London Park Lane. Fergus Henderson uses a lot of our suckling pigs and he's started getting more obscure items from us now too, such as lamb's brains and stomachs. Our big-name customers are very particular – if they didn't believe the product was right, they simply wouldn't buy it from us.'

■ *Starters from £5.95, mains from £9.95. Durham Ox, Westway, Crayke (01347 821506; thedurhamox.com).*

Good rare-breed pork is a taste revelation, which is why restaurants such as Theo Randall, St John and Jamie Oliver's Fifteen have Yorkshire's Taste Tradition on speed dial. The farm also produces first-rate beef and lamb. Available online, or in person from Thirsk HQ and independent food stores. (tastetradition.co.uk)



James Wright at The Durham Ox