



ROYAL
ASCOT

A WINNING FORMULA



Every year, Royal Ascot welcomes some of the UK's leading chefs to cater for the 300,000 from around the globe who attend the world's most prestigious race meeting. And 2019 is no exception: inspired and creative fine dining will be provided by Raymond Blanc OBE, Simon Rogan, Phil Howard, and newcomer Ollie Dabbous, who have eight Michelin stars between them. We speak to Ascot newcomer Ollie to find out what he has planned and what it means to him to be involved.



Royal Ascot Fine Dining Preview evening



With his baby son keeping him awake at night, filming for Saturday Kitchen and 600 covers at Mayfair's HIDE, you'd forgive 37-year-old Ollie Dabbous for being weary. But nothing could be further from the truth - it's clear that his energy and enthusiasm, along with incomparable creativity and a healthy dose of self-belief are set to combine and create dishes that will be odds-on winners at this year's Royal Ascot meeting in June.

Ollie's restaurant HIDE is already a hot ticket on the London fine dining scene. Ranging over three floors with sweeping views of Green Park and a wonderful natural aesthetic of wood and natural materials, it won a Michelin star just five months after opening in April 2018, testament to the "seasonal dishes created with restraint and finesse" that emerge from the kitchen. His aim is for the restaurant to be "homely, warm, individual and progressive, but with a slight quirkiness to it and individuality." Michelin bistro - "fine dining in trainers", is how he describes the ground floor restaurant, Ground, while upstairs is more refined, more theatrical.

Instead of going to catering college, Ollie decided to learn from some of the best chefs in the business: Raymond Blanc, Heston Blumenthal, René Redzepi at Noma and a longer stage at Mugaritz honed his skills and techniques. But, he says, "I like to think my cooking style is quite identifiable. At Le Manoir, I learnt how to achieve clarity of flavour, the hallmark of Raymond Blanc's cooking. Theatre and a narrative go a long way, but flavour is the most important thing."

Ollie will be reunited at Royal Ascot with former mentor Raymond Blanc, as well as Phil Howard and Simon Rogan, both of whom will be running restaurants over the five-day meeting. "It will be good to work with Raymond again - hopefully we can grab a drink at the end of the day and compare notes. I'm sure cooking at Royal Ascot will be hard work but it depends how our service goes. It would be great to set up a WhatsApp group!"

I wondered how Ollie will approach cooking for the crème de la crème of British racing. "Royal Ascot is one of the highlights of the British summer. Aside from the racing, the food offering there is gaining an amazing reputation in its own right. It's a stellar line-up this year so I'm very flattered to be asked and excited to be a part of it.

"I'm not a diva. The most important thing is that the customer is happy: they haven't chosen to come to Hide; they're going to Royal Ascot and eating my food there. It's more of a two-way street."

Like most chefs, Ollie has a great affection for summer cooking. "In June you barely need to touch the food as ingredients are so good. For example, we're doing a strawberry and custard tart with rose petals, steamed then steeped in rosewater syrup, and a sprinkle of lavender to evoke an English cottage garden. Strawberries taste a little bit of lavender or violet and I'm enhancing those fragrant floral tastes."

"For me, it's about taking classic English ingredients or combinations that are familiar and reinventing them slightly into something delicious, light and true to my style."



HIDE Mayfair



THE BALMORAL
by Ollie Dabbous

So what can diners expect from Ollie who will be cooking at the 220-cover restaurant The Balmoral, offering a plated menu and buffet-style chef's station? "You can't get any more English and summery than Royal Ascot. So I want to embrace that. For me, it's about taking classic English ingredients or combinations that are familiar and reinventing them slightly into something delicious, light and true to my style."

"One starter is English burrata from an Italian lady who's set up a company called Latteria. They make it the same day, to order, and it's very, very fresh. The richness of the cheese will be offset by tamarillo, gently confit'ed to concentrate its sweetness, with basil, olive oil and fennel pollen.

"The other starter will be Cornish cod brandade, salted very lightly with garlic, really good olive oil and served with pickled vegetables, black olives and crispy bread. It has lots of colour and texture - we want the food to reflect the fashion and the hats on show with lots of colour.

"The main course is charred salmon with nasturtium broth and a leek vinaigrette. We lightly cure it to firm it up and then it's lightly charred to give a bit of smokiness. The peppery sauce is made from blended nasturtium leaves - like adding horseradish to a dish, a twist on modern English.

"Barbecued Iberico pork, marinated overnight with fenugreek, served with a fennel and peach slaw is the other main course: again, smoky, fatty red meat with an acidic accompaniment using fruits and marigolds.

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“Vegetarians can choose barley risotto with summer vegetables and Spenwood cheese, a dish we’ve served in the Above restaurant at Hide. It’s relatively classic in concept, but really light and hard to beat, absolutely delicious. We cook the barley with tomato water; it sings summer with little pops of chopped herbs on top – tarragon, chervil, basil – so that every mouthful is different.

“For dessert, there’s a lemon verbena posset with summer fruits and blossoms. It will have less fat to make it cleaner and lemon verbena to add my own touch: I love lemon verbena... it should be seen as the English basil or like French tarragon.

“On the chef’s station menu, my own home-cured English charcuterie, cheese and smoked salmon. Other dishes are salad of tomato, creamy soft Graceburn cheese and black olives, plus vivid purple beetroot hummus with chickpeas for body and texture, white balsamic vinegar, garlic, cumin, lemon, with crudités, served on flatbread. The meat eaters will love our roast sirloin with Jersey Royals and warm horseradish buttermilk.”

So, will Ollie be sneaking out for a cheeky bet on the horses? He laughs, “I love watching live sport so being at Royal Ascot is a real treat, but I’ve never been to a race meeting as I didn’t grow up in a horse-racing environment. I’m sure the atmosphere is so different live from seeing it on TV... it’s very visceral when

you know what goes into it – the sacrifices that the trainers and jockeys make. I’m really excited and hope I get a chance to see bits of it here and there.”

He’s already planned everything out so that it runs smoothly. “I haven’t seen the kitchen set up yet but I have given a list of the equipment I need, done a massive prep list for each dish and am taking previous employees, so they know how I work and I know them. Logistically it’s a huge thing, but hopefully they’ll invite me back.”

Ultimately, though, it’s a chance for him to introduce himself and his cooking to an appreciative new audience. “I always want to show the best version of myself...a lot of people who go to Ascot won’t have been to HIDE, so it’s a good chance to showcase the restaurant too. And for me it’s nice to meet people in person. I don’t do social media – I prefer to say less and be at things.” One thing’s for sure: you can certainly place your bets on Ollie’s food being odds-on winners.

Royal Ascot 2019
Tuesday 18th - Saturday 22nd June

*For more information or to book please call
0344 346 3000, email hospitality@ascot.co.uk
or visit ascot.co.uk*
