

Andy Murray's new restaurant is a sublime celebration of Scotland

◆ Rosalind Erskine leaves Cromlix full of good food and a better appreciation of our Scottish larder



Just over a year ago I visited Cromlix, Andy and Kim Murray's five star hotel located just outside Dunblane. At this time the hotel had just one restaurant, the Glasshouse, and it was here that I spoke to general manager Barry Makin about the plans to add a huge extension, a new fine dining restaurant and new rooms. I also met the new executive head chef James Mearing who served us some courses during dinner while chatting about his move to Scotland.

Fast forward a year and Cromlix has reopened with the new extension, new kitchen, Glasshouse restaurant, new rooms, a woodland retreat spa and outdoor sauna with plunge pool and finally, a fine dining restaurant Cradle. Having seen plans and interviewed Kim Murray about what guests can expect it was exciting to finally see it all in person. It's hard to miss The Garden Room restaurant, housed as it is in the huge glass fronted extension. Although it's a very modern addition, it has been landscaped to fit comfortably in the grounds. But I'm visiting to try Cradle, the fine-dining restaurant which is located in a former private dining space. Seating only 16 it's a cosy space. As for the name, Kim Murray told The Scotsman that coming up with the name was "probably one of my favourite parts of this whole process". She said: "It basically stems from this idea that you are nourished by nature, and that's

what we're hoping to achieve in that room in terms of drawing on the local, the estate and the whole straight from the garden to the table element. "You, as a diner, come in and you're almost transformed by this experience. It sounds quite reverential, but the idea that it's a place of nourishment and transformation." We arrive ready for dinner and with open minds for a transformation via gastronomy. The dinner is a seven course tasting menu with snacks and an optional wine or soft drink pairing. Chef Mearing delivers some of the dishes and presents them; having settled into Scotland and his role comfortably since we last met. The three and a half hour meal kicked off with a vibrant green herb sorbet with gooseberry and wood sorrel; a wonderfully refreshing start to the meal, continued with snacks of a savoury nasturtium financier with a yuzu kosho. This was served alongside a brown



Scottish crab taco with tomato and garden salad. The final snack was the best of the garden showcased as vegetable crudites – baby courgettes, baby radishes and purple carrots – seasoned with oil and served with a carrot top pesto and seed dip. This was served with foraged gorse from the estate which was turned into a kombucha. Further dishes were a charred and almost succulent piece of mackerel served with a complex and smoky rhubarb BBQ sauce (which I am still thinking about) and a dill and horseradish snow; two portions of asparagus – one celebrating the delicate green vegetable as a single stalk served with pea hollandaise and the other an exploration of the white part of the vegetable, served as a sublime chawanmushi, slivers of pickled white asparagus with Oscietra caviar and toasted hazelnuts. These were followed by a juicy hand dived scallop served simply with salsa verde and verjus sauce topped with guanciale. Interestingly the bread course was in the middle of the meal and a welcome addition of individual glistening milk loaves served with Blackthorn salted butter and a moreish Isle of Mull cheddar royale. Mains were a fillet of north coast turbot enlivened with Shetland mussels and a

rich Naughton cider sauce followed by a saddle of Scottish Borders lamb served with lamb fat roasted Jersey royals and garden allium (which I'm told was delicious). A pre-dessert of lemon curd and pine sorbet ice cream cones was served on a bed of young pine before the main event; a celebration of Scottish strawberries with Cromlix honey and a kick from kampong pepper. Petit fours of elderflower and champagne macarons, Canelé de Bordeaux and Deanston truffles with hazelnuts ended the epic meal. I can't praise the staff enough, from Jason the sommelier who blew my mind with a delicious non-sweet pedro ximenez wine to our waitresses Manuella and Racquel. We were asked before we left to walk Archie around the grounds and enjoy a break in the rain, what the favourite dish was and it was the hardest meal – in recent memory – I've had to choose just one. During my time here last year, we talked about the team's Michelin Star aspirations after success with gaining a Michelin Key. I'm no inspector but this was up there with the best tasting menus I've had in Scotland, including those already with a star. I leave full of good food but with a better appreciation of our Scottish larder and yes, ever so slightly transformed.

“**You come in and you're almost transformed by this experience**”

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