

FOOD CHAIN

Festive *feast*

The Food Chain descends on Seckford Hall for its office Christmas party and has a cracking good time

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SARAH LUCY BROWN

When Jules and I used to work together from a business unit in Leiston, our office Christmas parties always presented a dilemma. A quiet table for two in a Leiston café perhaps? A festive sandwich at our desks? Or shall we push the boat out and have 'turkey and all the trimmings' in the pub down the road? We knew how to have a good time that's for sure. And best of all there was no likelihood of an indiscretion by the water cooler or an embarrassing karaoke moment.

But now this is a bit more like it – the Food Chain writers plus ones, as well as the magazine's editor, together for once for a special Christmas dinner at Seckford Hall just near Woodbridge.

Seckford Hall is a typical 16th century Tudor manor house – brick built, bristling with crenellated eaves, flamboyant chimneys and a heavy oak

door. A grade 2* listed building, it was taken over in August 2012 by a couple who love Suffolk and, cleverly, appointed Mark Suddes to be operations director. Under his guidance the place has been transformed. In a little over a year he has supervised the refurbishment and redecoration of the 32 bedrooms, restaurant (named the 1530 after the date of the building) and various event rooms, while simultaneously recruiting and training the staff. He has a palpable enthusiasm and a pride in Seckford Hall that is delightful and justified.

We meet in the cocktail bar, which has heavy wood panelling, a huge fireplace and some of the most ornate carved beams I've seen outside of a palace. They are the counterpoint for a sleek bar and some ultra modern furnishings. But the combination works and, after a brief guided tour, it's clear that the interior designer knows her stuff – it's not easy to combine Tudor with 21st century.

Head barman and sommelier, Lee Lawes, has prepared a special Christmas cocktail for us. Martini glasses, edged with icing sugar and with a jaunty sprig of holly, contain a whoah-crikey mix of fruity liqueurs, Pimm's, spices, fresh fruit juice and ginger. Served warm, it's rather like a Christmas pudding that's been liquidised so the bits don't get stuck in your teeth. And while we're having the second one, (not the drivers obviously) some canapés appear and disappear almost as quickly.

In our gorgeously-decorated private dining room our first course appears and it's a classic and a delight. Generous slices of Pinney's smoked salmon come with a creamy celeriac remoulade and freshly baked bread. Even as we eat, the conversation bubbles around and there are lots of noises of appreciation and approval. Most of the talk is about food of course and we all agree that good ingredients are essential to great cooking and how lucky we are to have it all in

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Suffolk Magazine's food reviewers all work in the local food industry. From left; Polly Robinson (Food Safari), Gerard King (butcher, Suffolk Food Hall), Julie Field and far right, Frances Hopewell-Smith (Jules & Sharpie) and Paddy Bishopp (Paddy & Scotts). If you have a suggestion for our reviewers please contact suffolkmagazine@archant.co.uk



Top; chef Liam Oakenfull; the cocktail bar; Mark Suddes and kitchen staff. Main picture; the stylish 1530 restaurant. Below; trio of puddings