

Saying that Stoke Place is in Slough is a bit like saying Buckingham Palace is an old building in a congested urban area containing an unnecessary number of chicken shops; true, but a bit misleading.

In reality, Stoke Place is a glorious country haven that feels a million miles removed from the congested city or the constipated suburbs. A converted stately home with a number of generously appointed suites and bedrooms (extremely popular amongst newlyweds, unsurprisingly), Stoke Place also houses a rather superb restaurant; The Garden Room.

Newly revamped, the interior is airy and modern without eliminating the building's rustic character, and the service is extraordinarily attentive. The menu is all-new and the wine list is the size of a dense Russian novel, but the *maitre d'* and head barman are already encyclopedically well informed and more than happy to assist indecisive diners in choosing their meal.

We began with starters of braised duck leg and rabbit loin – both dishes were presented with an almost sculptural attention to detail, though any guilt at demolishing the chef's handiwork was immediately forgotten as soon as food met palate; the rich, succulent rabbit, and duck cooked without a hint of dryness were both superlative starters. As our plates discretely vanished, further signs of the chef's creativity manifested in the form of a skillfully constructed *amuse bouche*; an edible gin and tonic. Difficult to describe, even more extraordinary to eat, the cucumber-infused palate-cleanser is almost worth the trip alone.

Our highlight, however, was undoubtedly the main course of beef; fillet, tongue and cheek each cooked to perfection. The meat was dark, juicy and mouth-wateringly tender, counterpointed wonderfully with a side of spinach and swede. A mere day after our visit (with the taste of the beef still fresh in my mind), the Garden Room received two AA rosettes; a justly-deserved testament to the work of chef Craig Van Der Meer and his team.

Our desserts – brioche and panna cotta, respectively – had everything to recommend them, although our senses were somewhat dulled by the enormity of the preceding courses (and the extremely good Merlot that accompanied the meal). We retired to our room with the satisfying fullness that comes with eating an unusually brilliant meal, and the wisdom that something's are worth travelling for – even to Slough. Especially to Slough, in this case.

*To book a table at The Garden Room at Stoke Place, call 01753 534 790 or visit <http://www.stokeplace.co.uk/>*