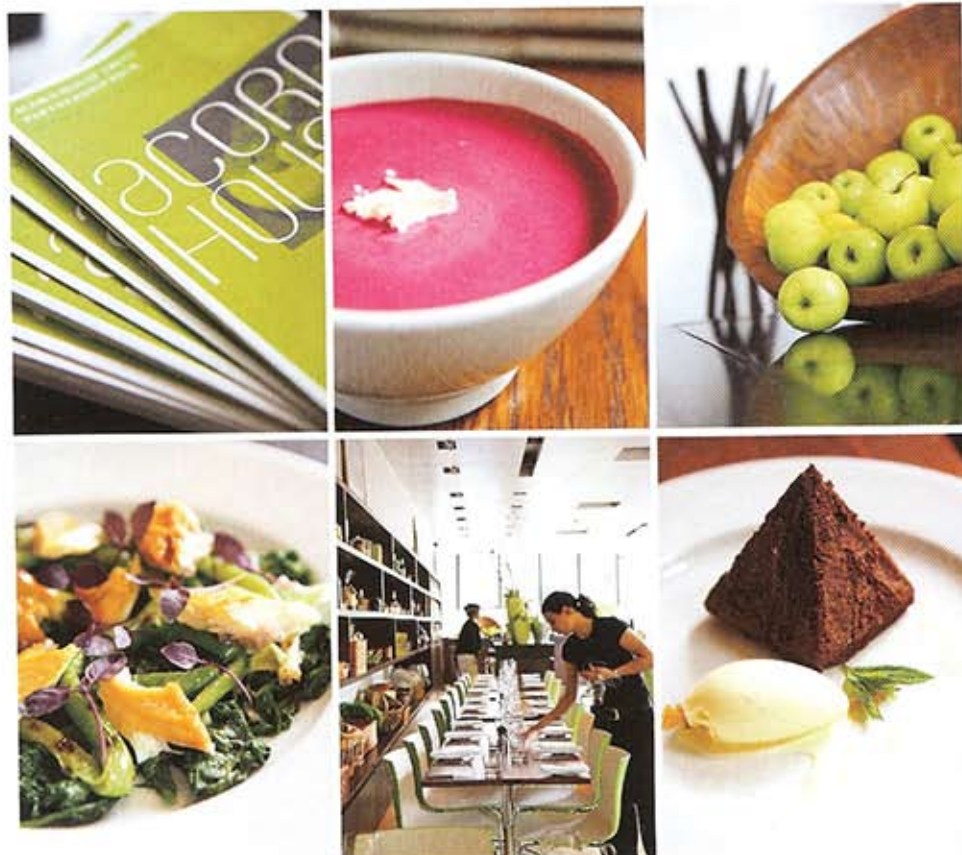


Green dining

From city to coast, café to country hotel, eco-friendly policies on food miles and even furnishings are being embraced, allowing diners to eat out with a clear conscience

EDITED BY AMBER DALTON PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATT MUNRO



ORGANIC BLISS

Percy's Country Hotel & Restaurant

Coomeshead Estate, Virginstow, Devon.
Tel 01409 211236; percy.co.uk

It's not every day you get to greet the animals who will make a vital contribution to your dinner. But then Percy's isn't an everyday place - it's an organic-food-lover's dream. Before lunch, we tramped through a little of the 130-acre estate, meeting owners Tina and Tony Bricknell-Webb's happily rooting piglets, gambolling lambs and pretty, inquisitive geese along the way. The Bricknell-Webbs' dogs came along too.

Tina's sure touch with the livestock was as spot-on in the kitchen. Homemade cumin and potato bread and a split-pea soup pre-starter warmed us up nicely, while starters of gentle, grilled goat's cheese with chutney and a warm salad of tender Cornish scallops were light and delicate.

"What you have here," pronounced Tony, as he set down our mains, "are two platefuls that have travelled zero food miles." And it showed. Roast loin of lamb with rosemary jus was packed with incredible flavour, and ruby-red, bacon-wrapped pigeon breast - shot on the estate - was meltingly tender and powerfully gamey. This was confident, unfussy cooking that let its top-notch ingredients shine; and a smooth bottle of 2003 Greek Tsantali Merlot Organic added a little extra glow.

For pudding we chose rhubarb and blackcurrant crumble with ice cream and custard - a perfect balance of sweetness, creaminess and acidity - and fruit meringue with toffee sauce.

A healthy dose of fresh air (and those indulgent puddings) led to some deep slumber in our pretty room, but after a hearty breakfast with outstandingly good bacon, we were ready for more of the great outdoors. In fact everything here - from the welcoming wellies you're encouraged to borrow for a walk, to the delightful food - feels open, balanced and honest. I'm glad this green dream has become such a well-judged reality. *Dinny Gollop*

★★★★ ££

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CAPITAL ECO-CREDENTIALS

Acorn House

69 Swinton Street, London WC1. Tel 020 7812 1842; acornbouserestaurant.com

The 1960s office-block exterior does little to suggest that Acorn House is, in the words of the *Times* restaurant critic Giles Coren, 'the most important restaurant to open in London in the past 200 years'. Over the threshold, a sleek if slightly cramped dining room of stained-wood tables and designer chairs, *above middle*, scarcely betrays the solid eco-credentials behind one of the new kids on the King's Cross block. Acorn House sources seasonal produce from small independent suppliers, never uses air freight, buys fish according to Marine Stewardship Council principles and supports organic and Fairtrade farming. It aims to minimise wastage, but then almost everything that is left over gets recycled anyway. Even the paint on the walls is organic and the wooden furniture is from sustainable sources. All of which would count for nothing if the food weren't so tasty.

Simple starters of buffalo Mozzarella, black fig and purple basil, and a soup of beetroot, cardamom and sour cream, *top middle*, show that the team in the kitchen, headed by a Roux brothers alumnus, has a flair for combining the best seasonal ingredients. My grilled lamb chops with anchovy sauce were exactly *comme il faut* - juicy and tender with bags of flavour. Twice-cooked pork belly with soy, ginger and spring onions fell apart with only slight provocation from Matthew's fork and rendered him unable to help me out with the flourless chocolate cake (shame); he did manage a spoonful of the excellent ginger ice cream, *above right*, before I polished it off. We left very few scraps for the restaurant's wormery... The wine list includes several organic selections, including a decent Beaujolais and a Chilean cabernet sauvignon by the glass. Acorn House pledges to train ten local youngsters a year in the eco-restaurant trade, so let's hope it spawns copies across the country. *Amber Dalton*