Local chairs, local cheese

The Olde Bell Inn, Hurley – the first in a family of English coaching Inns, updated. Using locally sourced food cooked simply; eating, drinking, lodgings.

Design doesn't have to just look good, it must be smelt, heard and felt, says creative director Ilse Crawford, recently acclaimed by Harper's Bazaar as one of Britain's most influential women, having created award winning projects such as Babington House and The Grand Hotel Stockholm. Her aim is to create places that make you feel happy.

Studioilse's latest creation is The Olde Bell Inn, Hurley. The starting point was to understand the context; to research the local area and history of the building. From that, to tell the ongoing story of the people and the place, rather than impose a style; to express the soul of the site.

Crawford's idea was to re-invent the traditional English Inn. Not a hotel where the rooms dominate but where the bar and restaurant are the heartbeat of the place. Parts of the building date back to 1135; The Olde Bell Inn has a 16th century Tudor barn for big parties, a Malthouse for medium gatherings and a dining room for a dozen or more, nooks and crannies and open fires.

Moving away from it's previous corporate incarnation, the Inn sets out to restate the spirit of Mr Rodwell, the famously hospitable former Olde Bell Innkeeper. The food is central to the project; using local suppliers as well as herbs, vegetables and fruit grown in the garden. Rosie Sykes is currently heading up the kitchen and cooking at The Olde Bell Inn. Sykes first found her passion for cooking with Joyce Molyneux at the Carved Angel, moving on to work in the kitchens of Alastair Little and Shaun Hill, before running her own renowned gastro pub, the Sutton Arms, as well as writing as the Kitchen Doctor for the Guardian newspaper.

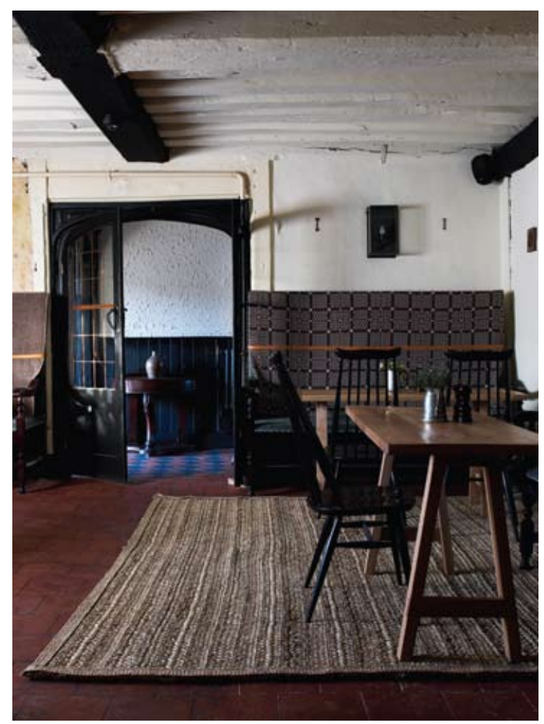
The Inn food offer includes Inn cooked pies, terrines, soda bread, seasonal greens and puddings that make you feel happy. Sykes says "I'm loving being in this part of the country as we have such a wealth of good local suppliers, from the Clarkes at Kingcup Farm who supply us with beautiful vegetables as well as introducing us to the local beekeeper whose honey we serve at breakfast, to Machins butcher who take a great interest in local meat, with an on-site smokery. Monday to Saturday, the Inn offers a short lunch menu to allow a cost effective and quick service: 2 courses for £12.50 or 3 courses for £15.50. Our bar menu is available 12-10pm every day and afternoon tea with home baked ginger bread and scones."

Aside from her Innkeeping, Sykes' book the 'Kitchen Revolution' is published in June for Ebury, and draws from seasonal produce and provides a no waste plan for your kitchen.

Dedicated local gardener, Lorna Cooke, has been reinstating the kitchen garden with vegetables, herbs and nurturing espalier fig and pear trees to the original kitchen garden walls. While the rest of the huge garden has 'let it's hair down' – gone are the strict borders and paving stones and now replaced with wild meadow flowers and apple trees for shade with a nod to The Wind in the Willows. From May onwards, there will be cooking from the summer kitchen: cuts of meats, whole fish accompanied by generous salads, washed down with local ales and summer punches, with a beer festival planned in July as well as weekend activities for children.

The first challenge was to restore the envelope of the building using appropriate

'One finds one's best welcome at an Inn'.



craftsmen and materials respectful to the Grade II listed building, such as traditional plaster made from lime and horsehair. An original plaster wall was uncovered intact and left in its raw state to show the layers of history.

Throughout the main building, the design uses country materials such as rush matting, high backed settles with Welsh blankets fastened on with bridal leather belts, sturdy oak tables and Ercol chairs from High Wycombe, once the chair making capital of England. Crawford believes "Materials are what make atmosphere, it's what makes people feel secure. I would rather use a small amount of the right material that reflects the history and the heart of the buildings. A little goes a long way."

The design team also linked up with local historian, David Burfitt. Not only a fount of knowledge, he provided local photographs from over the ages which are used throughout the bar. The Inn was always the centre of community and trading; a welcome respite from the trials of travel, as written above the front door at the turn of the century. 'One finds one's best welcome at an Inn' .

Crawford's holistic approach is to build a 'world'; "I love beautiful things but that is only half of it – you need the rest as well."

Next in line is The Crown Inn, Amersham – to launch Autumn 08.

The Olde Bell Inn
High Street, Hurley,
nr Maidenhead, Berks SL6 5LX
Tel: 01628 825 881
www.theoldebell.co.uk

The Bull Inn

At Bisham

Hidden in the heart of the beautiful village of Bisham is The Bull Inn, where a gastronomic standard has been set by the Lopez family that is not going unnoticed. Establishing itself over the past two decades as one of the most elegant and desirable addresses outside London, the perfect fusion of style and substance in the form of traditional articulate cooking, continues to receive numerous industry accolades.

Towards the end of 2006 Andres Lopez, the owner, received the ***Foodies Local Food Hero award***.

In 2007 demonstrating its international appeal, the restaurant was awarded the prestigious ***International Restaurant of the Year Award*** at a ceremony held in Spain, honouring gastronomic excellence. The exemplary standard of service provided is gracing all gourmands with a special distinction.

Bisham Village, Bisham, Marlow, Bucks SL7 1RR
Telephone: 01628 484734 www.bullinnbisham.com

Spring has sprung!! ...

Fresh, light, flavoursome food for Spring and Summer – that's what you'll find on the new menu at The Warren.

Book now on 01344 304446

The Warren
Forest Road, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 5SB
Tel: 01344 304446 • www.thewarrenwokingham.co.uk