

Abundance produces inspired combinations



THE Olde Bell, at Hurley is a 12th century coaching inn and a work in progress. In recent months executive chef Warren Geraghty and general manager Alan Dooley have invested £50k in an outdoor 'summer' kitchen, the only one of its type in the country.

Yet, the kitchen staff, of 15-strong, are driven to achieve the best results, not based on technology and the latest equipment, but by serving the freshest produce locally sourced. And when I say local, I mean mostly on site. Meat and dairy products are sourced from local farms and only the fish, from Devon and Cornwall, travels any distance, but when it comes to fruit and veg, the team of Warren, Alan and full time gardener Mandy Hill and helpers have a burgeoning vegetable-growing enterprise in delightful kitchen garden.

Effectively, the restaurant is totally self sufficient by dint of its home grown produce and the menu reflects a natural harmonic of seasonal produce and inspired combinations.

The focus is on old English varieties and Warren said: "We are trying different potatoes, each with their own flavour and different types of fruits and vegetables. We are always finding ways to use up all the produce. There's nothing like an over-abundance of varieties to push you down the path of experimentation and take you back to nature-dictated meals, which has always been our goal."

Warren was appointed as Dhillon Group's executive chef last year from the highly acclaimed restaurant West, Vancouver, having previously worked for A-list chefs such as Marco Pierre White.

Mandy Hill joined as The Olde Bell's head gardener in March this year and promptly interpreted Sarina Dhillon's, the group's co-founder and creative director and Warren's plans for self sufficiency into a tangible reality. By 2012 the Olde Bell will produce over 150 varieties of vegetables, fruit and herbs.

Projects in progress include the complete

recreation of a Victorian greenhouse, planting of wildflower gardens, the creation of a 150m x 70m fruit cage. They are planning to introduce bee hives, a potato patch and are looking to adopt a local charity. Alan said: "We want to teach kids about growing and cooking and to create information folders about our garden projects. We have numerous garden projects underway and we grow flowers for the hotel. It is all part of a journey and an ongoing story and it is fun." Warren said: "We are not trying to be clever or arrogant, just honest. Everything we use will have traceability."

In contrast to the tamed-productivity of the kitchen garden, is a laid-back, decorative wildflower garden with seasonal blooms and meandering pathways. Guests can picnic on individual grassy areas and they are also encouraged to seek Mandy's counsel and take away cuttings from the farm shop there, which also sells preserves, jame and breads.

www.theoldbell.co.uk

