



CROSSWAYS

There are no cross words at Crossways says Roger Wheeler

Way back in the 1970s a young chef called **David Stott** met **Clive James**, the man who was to become his lifelong partner. Together in 1976 they opened **The Fig Leaf** a restaurant in Waterloo Street, Hove. This was to prove to be one of the town's hottest restaurants; David was and still is a superb chef and Clive one of the friendliest front of house men that any restaurant could want. The Fig Leaf was an enormous success virtually from opening day. They introduced the idea of fixed price menus, novel for Brighton, but standard in France.



After 11 years they sold up and moved all of 17 miles and bought the Grade Two listed Georgian House **Crossways** in **Wilmington** on the A27, in the depths of the Sussex countryside. It was once the home of **Elizabeth David** the legendary cookery writer who is buried nearby.

Wilmington, famous for the Neolithic **Long Man** the chalk figure etched into the Downs, is one of the beautiful tiny villages that dot the Sussex Downs and Weald. It has a 12th Century Priory and church and today quite a few very desirable residences. Green wellies and 4x4s are everywhere. It has one pub, the **Giant's Rest** which serves an excellent pint of Harvey's bitter, which is brewed just nine miles away in Lewes and does some very decent pub grub.

Just opposite, across the busy A27 you will see the white painted house that is Crossways, set in two acres of grounds which even in February were very smart and well kept. The pond was covered in ice so the ducks were nowhere to be seen. David is still overseeing the kitchen and Clive still welcoming the guests with his knowing smile. When we were last there, another party had announced that they had been coming to eat David's food and enjoy Clive's banter regularly since 1981 having followed them from Hove. Even though they had moved to the north of England they felt the trip was worth it.

Crossways is one of the, now very fashionable, restaurants with rooms. They have just seven rooms, which have been given a complete and very modern makeover. Clive could have a second career as an interior designer if he wanted it. The new look rooms are in the new traditional boutique style, very comfy with acres of bed linen, flat screen TV's and shiny bathrooms.

But no one goes to Crossways for the rooms, nice though they are, it is, of course, the food. An evening in the small and uber tasteful dining room feels something like a private dinner party. All his ingredients, David assures patrons, come from local suppliers and being situated in the heart of rural Sussex that is as it should be.



I am not and never wanted to be a restaurant critic, I leave that to other experts in this magazine, however I do know that every meal that we have had at Crossways has been really lovely. Last time I had duck, not exactly straight from their pond, but very tasty and enough for several people. Their seafood pancakes are legendary and have been on the menu since day one. David is always very happy to share his secrets and pass on his recipes. The portions are generous to put it mildly; a first course is followed automatically with a homemade soup, the mains with never less than four vegetables and then a pudding that you just have to eat. It is never easy to get up from the table. We can never manage the petit fours that look lovely, but are beyond even my appetite.



David Stott has been in the restaurant business for the same time as Raymond Blanc, 35 years. Crossways is not exactly Le Manoir Aux Quat' Saisons, but neither is the price and in my opinion represent much better value for money. Dinner and B&B with M. Blanc starts at around £650 for two whereas the set price dinner menu at Crossways is a mere **£39.95**. The full gourmet treat of dinner, bed and breakfast is **£89** each, which we were quite happy to pay. Maybe the comparison with Raymond Blanc is a bit invidious; Sussex is full of smart, expensive, country restaurants, some with rooms.



It's a great shame that Gravetye Manor near East Grinstead has gone bust, which would be a fairer comparison with Crossways. Without any doubt though Clive and David will survive the current recession, offering exceptional value, great food, a good night's sleep a hearty breakfast and above all a warm and friendly experience.

www.crosswayshotel.co.uk
www.theroamingpen.co.uk