

Eating out of town – three family run restaurants to try

THREE VENUES IN BLAIRGOWRIE & COUPAR ANGUS MEANS IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR FOR THE BANNERMANS

- *Brothers and sisters leading the charge to look after customers safely, with Frenchman Arnaud doing it with Gallic charm*

As life becomes more normal for the hospitality sector after two agonising lockdowns, a family with the hotel trade in its DNA is leading the charge to look after guests safely. It's been buoyed by feedback from guests on just how much pleasure the sector brings to everyone, whether it's eating out, or getting away for a short break.



No31 April 2007

Alan Bannerman has owned and run The Red House Hotel in Coupar Angus for the past forty years, having inherited the business from his father Norman, and late Uncle Telford. The two men had originally developed an old potato store & railway yard into a hotel in 1980, having purchased the buildings from Scottish Brewers the year before.

Alan's younger brother Ian runs the public bar side of the Red House Hotel, doing well with an outdoor marquee in the carpark which has been there since last summer.

Another family member, Alan's sister Susan, will celebrate fifteen years of ownership this June, of Number 31, a popular café and bar in Wellmeadow, Blairgowrie, which was just a pub when Susan took it on. It now employs twelve local staff, and has developed a daytime food menu. Susan is finding that Number 31's covered outdoor terrace is proving very popular, even although alcohol can now be served indoors.

"We've always had the terrace upstairs, but now it has come

into its own since we re-opened, and we are promoting it a lot more," she said. "At this time, you have to think on your feet and do your best to keep people safe and happy."

Included in the family portfolio is another Blairgowrie based hospitality venue – stylish eatery, The Dalmore Inn – which has been managed since its opening in 2014 by Frenchman Arnaud Merrouche, originally from Dijon. Well known in Perthshire, having fulfilled senior management roles at Ballathie House Hotel, Arnaud came to Scotland over twenty five years ago, having also worked at hotels and restaurants in the Lake District, as well as his native France.

"Diners don't expect to find a Frenchman here in rural Perthshire," said Arnaud. "I think I reflect the food here though – Dalmore Inn offers a level of fine dining you'd most often experience in a restaurant in a large city, but our prices are certainly more modest, giving our diners the chance to try game dishes, such as pigeon and grouse, cooked with real skill, along with stunning desserts such as pistachio parfait."

"I'm also delighted to have my close knit team still gainfully employed, including local lad Lewis, who was able to complete his HND in Hospitality Management during the first lockdown," added Arnaud. "He's now increasing in confidence in the business, taking on more hours, and more responsibility. It's great to see!"



As Alan Bannerman explains, it has been a huge relief to get all three venues back open, with all staff, many of whom have worked with the family for a long time, retained in their roles. He is keen to pay tribute to Ian, to Susan, to Arnaud, and what he refers to as his entire “family” of staff.

“As a hotelier, we exist to look after guests, it’s what we enjoy doing most, and we missed our regulars very much over the last lockdown,” said Alan. “I found myself still coming into the hotel most days, just because it was something I was used to doing over the past forty years. I felt at a bit of a loss initially, but there were still jobs to do, and I got into a new routine.”

“I am sure Susan, Ian and Arnaud felt the same, it was a very unsettling time as we all missed our staff, as they are like family to us. Now, however, having re-opened, there is a definite mood of optimism in the air, and we are slowly and surely feeling more confident about the future. We’re picking up from guests that they have really missed all the social interaction that venues like ours provide on a day to day basis for the whole community, not just visitors to the area.”

“Going out for a meal is a treat to look forward to after a long week, as is getting away from one of the big cities to stay at the Red House and play golf.”

“Luckily, I think staycations are going to remain popular for a good while to come,” said Alan. “We’ve got bookings from golfing parties from the North East of Scotland, from Newcastle and Yorkshire, with leisure guests coming from all over, including Wales.”

As Ian Bannerman remarked, all three businesses anticipate demand for outside space continuing for some time yet.

“Our marquee at The Red House is covered and heated, so it’s been very popular. We’re going to keep it here all summer, as some guests may still want to sit outside. I think the outside areas across all three businesses – Dalmore Inn has outside tables too – are welcome additions which will be retained for a little longer. We will just have to wait and see what happens.”

“As a major centre of the community here in Coupar Angus – we are the only hotel left trading after many closures over the past four decades – we host the mobile Covid19 testing van in the carpark too. It’s reassuring for us all to know it’s there if we need it. We’ll support those staffing the facility in any way that we can,” he added.

Further details at www.red-house-hotel.co.uk and www.dalmoreinn.com

