

# Luxury at every turn

You drive down a 20mph zone, on a rutted road in desperate need of TLC and through a middle-class housing estate with cars parked each side of the road making it a tight carriageway, to reach atmospheric Prestonfield House, less than two miles from Edinburgh's historic Royal Mile. It was a dreich Monday night in early March, the wipers working hard to disperse the wetting drizzle.

The elegant sign at a substantial stone gate announced the hotel and providing a clue to what is in store. Turn left and your eyes are immediately glued to the hotel building down a floodlit, tree-lined, well-surfaced road. The hotel was lit in yellow and blue light, significant in this time of trouble in the Ukraine.

The Independent newspaper claims Prestonfield House is the most glamorous hotel in town. The reviews are gushing about the decor in this 17th-century Baroque mansion and the accolades for food from leading critics and magazines are plentiful.

On walking through the front door you are hit by opulence, theatre and luxury. This renowned establishment had has lots of TLC lavished on it. Unique rooms, all different, but featuring antique furniture, vases – even in the men's loo – and fine linen. This establishment exudes five-star as attention to detail is everywhere.

James Thomson has created an experience, offering the privacy and seclusion of a country estate, minutes from the centre of Scotland's Capital city. His staff make you feel at home the minute you enter. Coats are taken and you are ushered, discreetly, of course, to your destination.

It is around 60 years since Prestonfield House changed from being a private home to a luxury hotel, ample time to perfect

the offering.

We were directed up a curved staircase to an exclusive sitting room. Comfortable settee, warm, red wall covering, and antiques littered around.

The homely touch was underlined by Scrabble and Monopoly boxes discreetly tucked in an open cupboard. You feel at home.

We quickly chilled and the intimate room allowed guests who had not seen each other for some time, COVID-19 having intervened, time to chat. Others from the legal profession, talked about business, including the recent merger of two well-known Scottish firms.

The stress and strain of everyday living seemed miles away as we relaxed in the house situated in 20 acres of gardens and located in the shadow of stunning Arthur's Seat, an extinct volcano overlooking Duddingston Loch. The word indulgent came to mind as we walked a few steps to the private dining room, similarly decorated in warm red and antiques. Again, attention to detail.

Cutlery was presented, for example, fork point to linen, and bread arrived covered in linen in a silver tray, butter pads (round) were also in a silver tray, and drinks were dispensed efficiently and without fuss by the attentive staff.

Orders were taken and it was difficult to choose from the mouth-watering selection. Prestonfield-smoked salmon, fermented white cabbage, blood orange, buttermilk and pine oil or maple-glazed ham terrine, dainty pickled vegetables, golden raisins and a delicate portion of curried apple puree or golden beetroot, Knockraich crowdie (soft cheese) with chestnut and coriander, black trompettes (mushrooms) and sourdough were the alternatives.

Mains were blade of Angus beef en crouete, creamed brussel sprouts, mustard seeds and winter endive salad, or filet of sea bream, parmesan risotto, sprouting broccoli tempura, nori,

capers and almonds or confit butternut squash, spelt, king oyster mushroom, pickled walnut, cavolo nero (kale variety) and Cora Linn (ewe's milk cheese made with unpasteurised milk and traditional rennet).

The sweet selection was classic creme brulee or dark chocolate trifle, chocolate sabayon and brownie, creme Chantilly or steamed lemon and orange sponge pudding, Anglaise sauce, milk chocolate sorbet. Something to suit most.

Food presentation was eye-catching and tea arrived in elegant silver pots with a strainer. Real tea, not bags here. Coffee was the alternative with home-made petit fours.

Too soon, the taxi arrived, but this luxury dining experience will be remembered and recalled for some time. Yes, the glowing reviews on the back of the menu were right. This was five-star.

PICTURE: part of the grounds surrounding Prestonfield