

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES, IRISH INGREDIENTS ENLIVEN CLASSIC CUISINE AT DROMOLAND CASTLE

Contemporary classics and superb service suit the elegant surroundings at Earl of Thomond restaurant

Newmarket-on-Fergus, IRE. – The setting: the magnificent and historic Dromoland Castle, one of Ireland's finest castle hotels and honoree of Condé Nast Traveler's Gold List, Europe, for five years running.

The clientele: a diverse mix of sophisticated international travelers, devotees of premiere golfing destinations, first-timers to Ireland, and discerning locals.

The venues: The award-winning formal restaurant, Earl of Thomond; the adjoining Cocktail Bar; The Gallery, a relaxing library-style setting; the sun-splashed Drawing Room; the informal Fig Tree Restaurant; and the magnificent banqueting center at Brian Boru Hall.

The challenge: create consistently excellent cuisine perfectly suited to all three – the setting, the clientele, and the venues.

The man for the job: Classically trained Executive Chef David McCann, since 1995 the cornerstone of Dromoland Castle's sterling reputation for impeccable dining experiences.

The crown jewel of the dining venues over which Chef McCann presides is the internationally renowned Earl of Thomond restaurant. The superb service -- welcoming yet discreet, and never intrusive or pompous – perfectly complements the classically beautiful yet comfortable setting, with its elaborate wainscoting, opulent wall treatments and classic place settings. As for the cuisine: the classical European pedigree of the chef's cooking is evident in every course and each menu – whether à la carte, five-course table d'hôte or vegetarian – yet international flourishes and a distinct Irish sensibility infuse every dish as well. Asked to describe this unique style, Chef David (as he is known around the halls of the Castle) concedes that, "Yes, I am a very classical cook. I incorporate other influences as well, however, to keep things fresh." Just as fresh as the flavors are the ingredients, which are locally sourced daily to the maximum extent possible.

Examples of that fresh Dromoland approach abound: traditional roast scallops with new season carrots and cardamom dressing. Pave of halibut, onion and garlic puree, wild mushrooms, peas, broad beans and pak choi, jus court. Nicoise styled salad with quail eggs and spiced tomato salsa. Shallot and garlic puff pastry tart with local Inagh goat cheese, rocket and mustard salad, and salsa vert remoulade. Even the children's menu is a blend of traditional and innovative, with offerings such as melon with orange scented puree.

Sommeliers Ian Scott and Michael Leitner are pleased to recommend selections to accompany dinner from the restaurant's sixteenth century wine cellar, or to assist diners in sorting through the extensive wine list themselves. There are also wines to suit the luscious dessert delicacies on offer, from raspberry soufflé with banana sorbet, to tiramisu with coffee bean ice cream and amaretto jelly, to an assortment of Irish farmhouse cheeses.

Cocktails, whether served before dinner or after, range from classic to très chic. A delightful place to enjoy them is the Cocktail Bar, an octagonal-shaped room that once served as Lord Inchiquin's study.

Although the offerings vary at Dromoland Castle's other dining venues, the attention to detail evident in Earl of Thomond's menu extends to each of them, reflecting their distinct personalities. The Gallery, located in the castle proper, is a lovely promenade furnished with large arched windows, comfortable furniture, and opulent window and wall treatments. The menu includes classic sandwiches, many with an Irish touch; hearty yet elegant snacks such as Irish smoked salmon and grilled Irish sausages; cheese selections; and delightful desserts. Also within the castle walls is the Drawing Room, a cozy retreat with historic family portraits, antique furniture, and an impressive wood-burning fireplace. Traditional afternoon tea is hosted there daily by Mrs. White.

The five-star Fig Tree Restaurant is located in the Dromoland Castle Golf & Country Club, on the far side of the Castle's formal walled gardens. A dynamic, informal venue, it includes a bright dining room graced with modern art, the wood-paneled Green Room Bar, and charming patio seating overlooking the gardens. Menu selections are intended to satisfy all palates and so range from the international – penne pasta with Cashel blue cheese, forest mushrooms and garden peas -- to the traditional – the Fig Tree Irish Beef Burger and traditional fish and chips with tartar sauce.

Brian Boru Hall is a magnificent banqueting facility graced with arched balconies, heraldic banners, chandeliered ceilings, and rich wood paneling. Equipped with its own kitchen and bakery, the Hall meets the challenge of extending Dromoland Castle's five-star dining and service standards to gatherings as large as 450.

Not to be forgotten are twenty-four hour in-room dining, special "Movie Night In" treats, and delectable picnic lunches.

After presiding over it all for a decade and half, Chef David confesses, "I could never see myself staying the one job for so many years; however, I found myself fortunately surrounded by quality people who are professional and have a genuine love for the hotel and food."

What more could he – or his guests – ask for?

Dining at Dromoland Castle: marvelous cuisine, a majestic setting, and a touch of Irish magic.

About Dromoland Castle:

Dromoland Castle, located in Newmarket-on-Fergus, County Clare, was built in the 16th century. Majestically set on the shores of Lough Dromoland, it is surrounded by over 410 acres of breathtaking scenery, including a championship parkland golf course. Lavish interiors, fine food and superb wines complement the deluxe accommodations of the Castle's 99 guest rooms, while Dromoland Castle Golf and Country Club, an intimate spa and traditional outdoor recreational opportunities ensure a unique guest experience.

Dromoland Castle is located at Newmarket-on-Fergus, Co. Clare, Ireland. The hotel can be contacted at: 011 353 61 368144 or 1-800-346-7007; website www.dromoland.ie. Reservations can be made through the hotel (sales@dromoland.ie) or through The Dromoland Collection at: www.dromolandcollection.ie.

The Dromoland Collection comprises Dromoland Castle and Castlemartyr Resort, two of Ireland's finest and most celebrated hotels. The hotels in this collection embody the legendary Dromoland tradition of incomparable hospitality complemented by exquisite surroundings, yet each possesses a distinctive style, character and charm all its own.