

# Holm House

Billed as the perfect seaside escape, this luxury boutique hotel in Penarth is more than just a dining experience – it's a whole *lifestyle* experience

By HUGO BALL  
Outdoor photo by JON TURTLE

**B**uilt in the 1920s by JS Neale, the son of a fishing-fleet magnate, boutique hotel and spa Holm House has a charm and glamour all of its own. Located on Marine Parade in Penarth – otherwise known as ‘Millionaires’ Row’ – it was a big draw in its previous incarnation; the likes of Kylie Minogue, Benedict Cumberbatch and Gary Lineker have all stayed here. After closing in 2012, the luxury destination finally reopened in November last year following considerable hype, fully restored to its former glory following a massive renovation and extension programme.

Surrounded by its own lovely gardens, overlooking the Bristol Channel, it oozes grandeur. It's decidedly ritzy inside, too; booked in for an overnight stay, my large, elegantly decorated double bedroom – Bron y Glyn, one of a whole suite of opulent contemporary rooms, designed by Cardiff-based interiors expert Deborah Drew – has a host of extravagant touches, including a king-size bed and a feature bath situated at the window, where you can take in the glorious views and just *relax*. It's so comfortable and homely that I'm half-tempted to kick back on the bed for the night, order room service and enjoy a bit of high-definition *Wolf Hall* on the telly, but the hotel's spa beckons.

I'm booked in for an hour and a half of treatments before dinner, and after charging around the city all day, I'm in dire need of a bit of downtime. There's everything you need here to fully switch off, with various spa packages, facilities and signature treatments on offer, plus an enticing hydrotherapy pool. Plans are afoot to install an outdoor hot tub in time for summer, too.

Therapist Abi soon gets to work on my tired bones, expertly administering a back exfoliation, full body Ayurvedic massage and mini-facial, the latter using Japanese rice bran to brighten the skin and deep-cleanse. It's all highly blissful and deeply relaxing, of course, and I can feel my work stress, built up over weeks and months of hunching over a keyboard, just ebb away – it's so

wonderfully dreamy that, embarrassingly, I have to stop myself nodding off and drooling on numerous occasions.

After the heavenly spa treatments and massage, I float back to my room. It's tempting to have a quick snooze, but it's already time to head down for supper.

Happy to welcome both residents and non-residents, the restaurant itself is simply decorated – classy, but not too fussy – and beautifully framed by those glorious outdoor vistas, with an easy-going convivial atmosphere to boot.

Suddenly very hungry after all that spa loveliness, I slurp down a quick amuse bouche of velvety tomato soup with sherry foam; jolly good it is, too, bursting with a depth of sweet, rich tomatoey flavour.

Then, on to the supper menu, which looks to be a litany of pure, simple indulgence, from scallops with black pudding chanterelles and sherry to a fab-sounding artisanal Loch Duart salmon with beetroot, blood oranges and chive emulsion. It *must* be good – I can hear other diners cooing over their food as it arrives at the table.

In the end, I go for the pressing of ham hock to start, and it's just divine: soft, fall-apart, well-seasoned pig, served with a cute little toffee apple, a spiced chutney and a buttery onion brioche – like a posh ploughman's.

After a lovely palate-cleanser of sweet/tart apple sorbet with cider jelly – *crazily* good – a pheasant and bacon ballotine arrives. It's gamey, beautifully moist and plump, with a sideshow of neatly-arranged accompaniments: blobs of sweet rum and raisin puree, braised baby carrots, and an immaculate oblong of soft pomme fondant the size of a rugby player's finger.

Desserts are a further treat, especially as general manager Juan Fernandes insists I have two. The Granny Smith panna cotta works brilliantly with the various bits of cider jelly, honeycomb, yoghurt and apple sorbet that make up the very pretty finished plate; and although the chocolate *delice*, served with salt-baked pineapple and fennel, is a touch too rich for my tastes, it's a champion combo nonetheless. Juan even insists on a tot of rum (to help me ‘digest’) before I finish up and head off to bed – best night's sleep I've had for ages, natch.

The ‘new’ Holm House, then, has been more than worth the wait. It's good to have it back. **CL**



IT MUST BE GOOD – I CAN HEAR OTHER DINERS COOING OVER THEIR FOOD



**DINING DETAILS** Holm House, Marine Parade, Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan, CF64 3BG; Tel: 02920 706029; holmhousehotel.com **Prices** Starters from £6.50, mains from £12, desserts from £6.95 **Vegetarian choice** A few token options **Child-friendly** Families are welcome, but in truth, this is more of an indulgent boutique destination for discerning adults **Wine list** Fantastic selection of great whites and reds from around the world, plus Champagnes, rosés and dessert wines **Service/atmosphere** Slick, friendly waiting staff, full of bonhomie; very relaxed and chatty midweek atmosphere