

BEST NEWCOMER JUDGES' AWARD

All taste and no waste

A staff canteen turned greener-than-thou gourmet restaurant, the Acorn House in King's Cross is our newcomer of the year. **Jay Rayner** tells the story of local-community regeneration, rooftop composting, and high-end gastronomy that manages, somehow, to produce only half a bag of rubbish a day

At the heart of the restaurant that has won our coveted newcomer of the year award is a load of old rubbish. 'That was the first thing I thought about when I saw this site,' says chef Arthur Potts. 'How can we deal with the rubbish? I've recycled and re-used all my life but, for the 19 years I've been working as a chef, I'd not been able to carry that over into the kitchen. I was becoming offended by the amount of waste we produced.' He was determined to do something about it. Working with his business partner, Jamie Grainger-Smith, who oversees front of house, he has. The result is Acorn House in London's King's Cross, a restaurant that does much more than just mouth

platitudes about seasonality and locality on its menu. Everything here, from the bulbs that light it to the paint on the walls, from the oil in the deep-fat fryer to the ink in the waiters' pens, is designed to ensure that the business makes the smallest impact on the environment possible.

This in itself is not entirely original. Other restaurants have tried something similar. But Acorn House is head and shoulders above the rest. First, it has taken the project further than anyone has ever attempted. And second – and this easily gets forgotten in the pursuit of principles – the food is really, really good. Arthur and Jamie, both 36, first met a decade ago, while working at the River Café. Both also worked at Jamie Oliver's 15, and Potts has experience with the French godfathers of »

Beetroot soup

Fully traceable English beetroot from Sunny Fields organic farm, less than 70 miles away, in season now. Like all their vegetables, it's delivered by Andreas Georgiou in a hybrid car and all packaging is reused. Sour cream from Normandy, road-freighted to UK. Organic vodka by UK5 in Surrey. Unbleached recycled biodegradable paper napkin under bowl.

Filtered tap water

Produces less carbon emissions as there is no need for delivery trucks to drop off bottled water. Filtered by a four stage process. If you ask for it, you can have Belu bottled mineral water which is sold in compostable plastic bottles.

Oak table

Made with oak sustainably grown in Norway. The lighting is from energy efficient bulbs running on electricity from a renewable source. Walls are painted with low-chemical paints.

Rhubarb, sable stars and custard

Made with English rhubarb (in season now), fair-trade sugar, fair-trade vanilla, and organic English cream and eggs.

Chapel Down white wine

Made in Kent, road-freighted 60 miles.

Wood pigeon, spring greens, pancetta and honey

English pigeon from Norfolk via Ginger Pig butchers at Borough Market in London. Greens from Secretts Farm, Surrey (in season October-May). Local London honey produced three miles away, via Alexandra Palace farmers market. Pancetta and prosciutto road-freighted from Italy. Thyme from England delivered by hybrid car. As much kitchen waste as possible is composted on the roof of an office block next door. Only half a bag of rubbish is generated by the kitchen each day.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **ROMAS FORD**