



Above: The Oxford Artisan Distillery's copper still

The Straight Rye makes its debut in the UK this month (£45, thegospelwhiskey.com).

The UK has a new crop of ryes coming, too. This spring, The Oxford Artisan Distillery will unveil its first fully fledged rye, made with locally grown heritage grain. And the East London Liquor Company recently released a rye aged in a mix of oak and chestnut casks (chestnut would be against the rules for a Scottish single malt but was not uncommon for English whisky back in the day). Dark and tannic, it's rye at its most intense – roasty coffee, bitter chocolate, and Black Forest gâteau with squishy cherries (£75, eastlondonliquorcompany.com).

Fife's innovative new Inchdairnie distillery also has a rye in the works – the first to be made in Scotland for more than a century. RyeLaw won't be released for several more years, but it already tastes pretty good.

FOR THE TIME BEING, RYE'S HEARTLAND IS STILL NORTH AMERICA

com); for sipping, the aromatic 10-year-old Straight Rye (£200, harveynichols.com). The cult cross-border rye Whistlepig 10-year-old also makes a five-star Old Fashioned (£79.95, thewhiskyexchange.com).

And don't overlook the old guard: the majestic Sazerac 18-year-old (£1,200, thewhiskyexchange.com);

Heaven Hill's Rittenhouse Rye 100 Proof (£39.90, masterofmalt.com), so spicy and full-flavoured it's almost chewy; and the splendidly cranky Wild Turkey Rye (£27.92, thedrinkshop.com) that might not be as fancy as some – but no other whiskey will give you a better rye bang for your buck. ■HTSI

@alicelascelles



MICHTER'S STRAIGHT RYE, £49.84, MASTEROFMALT.COM

EATING

Feel the burn

A Cotswolds inn with a wall of open flame is a mouthwatering prospect at a time when cooking over fire has never been hotter, says *Ajesh Patalay*

When I heard a new coaching inn was opening in the Cotswolds, where the menu would centre around cooking over

fire, I knew I had to go. Everything about that concept appealed to me. The Double Red Duke in Bampton (a village where scenes from *Downton Abbey* were shot) certainly looks the part. A wisteria-clad 16th-century exterior opens onto a warren of snugs, a dining room and bar with open fires, and 19 comfy bedrooms with tubs you could do laps in.

The big attraction, though, will be the kitchen. Overlooked by a 14-seat chef's counter, it comprises a wood oven, a 20-spit meat rotisserie, a clay grill with four adjustable racks, a 20-spit fish rotisserie and extras including a spit-jack for hang-roasting fowl and small leg joints (it bastes the meat in fat while it rotates). Everything is fuelled by wood and charcoal (specifically applewood and charcoal from Whittle & Flame, based at Cornbury Park).

The Double Red Duke is run by Sam and Georgie Pearman, the husband-and-wife team behind nearby properties The Swan at Ascott-under-Wychwood and The Chequers in Churchill. The group acquired the building early last year (it used to house a pub called The Plough) and have spent the past year renovating. Installing a fire kitchen was Sam's idea. He liked the theatre of it, and recruited Richard Turner of Pitt Cue Co and Hawksmoor to devise the menu, which includes ember-baked heritage beetroots, wood-roast sea scallops and burnt leeks with brown butter.

I started with the ash-baked potato with braised duck, crème fraîche and Exmoor caviar. The potato had been confited in duck fat so I was expecting the skin to be crispier. But I couldn't complain. It was delicious: a starchy parcel of saltiness, fat and cream. The wood-roast pork belly ribs had a tasty crackling trim. The lamb chops were succulent and flame-singed. Working my way through a showcase of chopped steak (a mix of sirloin, chateaubriand, T-bone porterhouse and ribeye from Hannan Meats in Ireland and Taste Tradition in Yorkshire), I got to savour their beautiful smoky variation. Finally a leg of lamb, rubbed in rosemary and garlic, cooked on the rotisserie for four hours, and cut into slices:

THE MEAT WAS LOVELY BUT THE BURNT BITS ARE OFTEN THE BEST

SPIT-ROASTED LEG OF LAMB



Left: cooking with fire at Ekstedt in Stockholm. Below: Ekstedt's flame-cooked mussels



the meat was lovely but it was the bark (from the skin turning black) that got my attention. Intensely herby and bitter, it confirmed that the burnt bits are often the best.

When it comes to cooking over fire we can, of course, take things into our own hands. Traditionally, barbecuing is reserved for summer. But according to Firepits UK, which manufactures steel fire pits, the past few months have been its busiest quarter ever. Customers in search of novelty

and an excuse to get outside, however cold it may be, have been cooking their Christmas turkey in a roasting oven over a fire pit, roasting vegetables on charcoal, even grilling whole lamb carcasses on asado racks. For open-fire enthusiasts,

I recommend two books by leading exponents. The first is *Food From the Fire: The Scandinavian Flavours* (Pavilion, £25) by Niklas Ekstedt, at whose eponymous restaurant in Stockholm everything is cooked over open flames.

This includes wild oysters cooked with coal-melted beef tallow that is dripped onto them from a "flambadou" (or cast-iron cone). The other is *Seven Fires: Grilling the Argentine Way* (Artisan, £27.99) by Francis Mallmann, who operates several restaurants in South America and Los Fuegos at the Faena Hotel in Miami Beach.

Taking his lead from generations of gauchos and Native Americans, Mallmann outlines the various ways to cook over fire, from "rescoldo" (buried in ash) to "caldero"

(in a cast-iron kettle). Most ambitious is his recipe for "una vaca entera" (a whole cow). As well as the cow, it requires two cords of hardwood logs, two gallons of salmuera (basting brine) and, to hoist the carcass, one heavy-duty block-and-tackle attached to a steel stanchion set in concrete, one two-sided truss made of heavy-duty steel, one 9sq ft sheet of corrugated metal, and a pair of heavy-duty pliers. I already have the pliers. The rest I'm working on. ■HTSI

@ajesh34



Left: wood-roast pork belly ribs at the Double Red Duke. Below: chef Richard Turner (on left) and owner Sam Pearman

