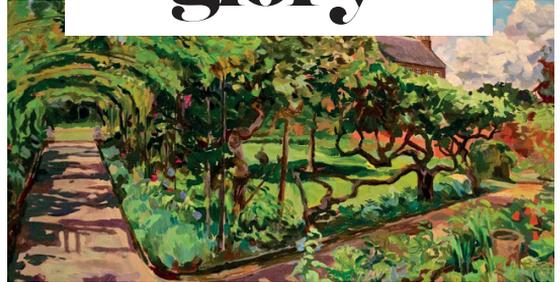




Crowning

glory



Liz Nicholls visits the lovingly renovated Crown Inn in Church Enstone whose artistic owners offer a September landscape painting workshop as well as great food & drink

Having always been a city-lover, thriving on the smog and shriek of busy places, I'm quite surprised how hard I've fallen for the Cotswolds. In fact, my mates back in London mock me for being such a country bumpkin.... until they visit, that is.

So, arriving in Church Enstone on an impossibly beautiful summer's evening filled my heart with joy, not least because I'd heard such great things about the food at this arty village pub paradise.

Victoria and George Irvine bought The Crown a year ago and have since lavished the sandstone beauty with TLC, renovating its wonky interior and converting the spaces above the pub into five swoon-worthy bedrooms of five-star calibre. (Thanks to Felicity who took me for a snoop, and dealt admirably with my witterings about whether the building is haunted. The short answer is 'no').

We were pleased to see the pub bustling with customers midweek and even more pleased to see our colourful dishes arrive: perfectly fried and seasoned calamari and chunky asparagus topped with hollandaise and lacy fronds of salad. My seabass with a slice of golden polenta and

Provençal veg was sublime while my date's hearty salmon in a curry-infused broth shows off the talents of the chefs (Chris Taylor and Christopher Sheppard) at using Asian flavours to bring out the best in seasonal local produce. The menus change constantly and you can whet your appetite by having a look online to see what's hot tonight.

Every nook and cranny in the pub is full of quirky, creative charm; a graffitied piano as you enter and artworks on every wall. These are the mesmerising work of George, a renowned local artist (his studio is in Middle Barton) who taught art at Stowe for 12 years before setting up his own art school in 2012.

Thrillingly, for frustrated artists like me, George is hosting a two-day Making Paintings course, running from 17th-19th September at his studio. These include dinner and B&B in The Crown, with a special three-course arts dinner with George and Victoria on the last night. Painters of all levels can work outside in acrylic and oils. As far as settings go, you'd be hard-pushed to find a more gorgeous Muse than this glorious setting.

The Crown, Mill Lane, OX7 4NN. Call **01608 677262** or visit www.crowninnenstone.co.uk