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Dartmouth's New Angel

Top chef John Burton Race's move to provincial France was documented in his Channel 4 series *French Leave*. Now he's back and has chosen Dartmouth for his new venture. Words by Stephanie Fox, photograph by Ray Smith.

Why did you decide to leave the delights of rural France for Devon?

Personally I would have stayed on but certain members of my family were desperate to come home, particularly the elder girls who felt they had done their time there. We chose Devon because it's got the lot. I can get my shellfish and fish, fantastic dairy produce and beautiful livestock. It's really absolutely no different from France as we are using 90 percent local produce in our restaurant.

How did you find The New Angel?

Originally the plan was to find a tiny country house where I could have a few bedrooms and do some cooking and keep it quite simple. While we were away in France, The Horn of Plenty, a country house hotel near Tavistock, was advertised in the *Caterer and Hotel Keeper* so when I got back I spoke to the owner but they'd had a change of heart. All the other property we looked at for this type of business was too expensive in Devon, so it was on to plan B which was to find a restaurant. Quite by chance a chap

phoned up and said "how about The Carved Angel?" - and eventually we struck a deal.

What's the history of The New Angel?

The building dates back to 1894 and it has been a restaurant since 1961 when a local Dartmouth family opened Glennie's. It became The Carved Angel in 1974 under the partnership of George Perry-Smith, Heather Perry-Smith, Joyce Molyneux and Tom Jaine. It achieved many accolades including *Good Food Guide's* Real Food Restaurant of the Year in 1984 and had a Michelin star from 1979 to 1987.

What are you aiming to achieve with the restaurant?

We wanted an informal, relaxed restaurant without the formality of old fashioned dining rooms. Really somewhere all the family can enjoy and have a bite to eat or a full three course meal.

How is it going?

Brilliant. At the moment (July prior to holiday season) we are working to half capacity at lunch time but in the evenings we are full and at weekends if it were three times the size we could fill it. I'm keeping my fingers and toes crossed but so far it's going down a bomb with the local people.

How is your family coping with another move?

They are all fairly resilient. If you're involved with me you have to go a hundred miles an hour. My little ones have settled in at their schools and got their first school reports this week, which all say they are doing really, really well. All in all it's great.

Are you continuing to see more of your family as you did in France?

Absolutely not, no. It's because it's a new business and there's so much at stake so it demands a hell of a lot of attention. Even though we're going for simple food with the emphasis on ingredients, it's still very, very demanding.

Have you come across fantastic local food producers in Devon, the way you did in France?

Yes absolutely. I have a local producer growing all my lettuces and herbs organically, and a little lady just outside of Totnes providing me with my strawberries and raspberries. I've found local goats cheese producers but it is very difficult in this country to find cheese made from unpasteurized milk, because of legislation. But I've built up a network of contacts so I have people going out for brill, turbot, sea bass, crabs, and the local South Devon beef is proving delicious. I am getting beautifully reared organic chicken and fresh local hens' eggs. Best of all, as the word goes round that I am here, people are now knocking on my door and finding me, which is great.

What local produce will you be offering up on your menus this autumn?

I'll be going to the Moors. I'm a very keen shot so we'll be getting in partridge, pheasant and venison. In the autumn months there are places on the Moors, which I've been sworn to secrecy about, to pick ceps, the wild mushrooms. Really it's all here, you've got Dittisham plums, apple orchards, pears - there's plenty of local ingredients here to make dishes.

Have you found a market in Devon to compare to Revel in France?

No, they're just not that organised here but it's one of my crusades and campaigns. The French make real co-operatives but they just haven't got that far here. There are places like Riverford Farm which utilise produce from 11 different farms but it's very localised. You don't get the big juggernauts coming down and taking the food up to London markets. It's a shame because the producers and produce are here but hopefully it will come.

Finally, what are your aspirations for The New Angel?

Really to provide a place where you can show off the best of local produce for local people.

The New Angel, 2 South Embankment, Dartmouth.

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Open 8am-11am, 12pm-2.30pm and 6.30pm-10.30pm.

Closed Sunday evenings and Mondays.

French Leave by John Burton Race is published in paperback by Ebury Press at £7.99 and is available from all good bookshops.

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