

■ Ailsa was very impressed by the fillet of hake with potato dauphinoise, spears of asparagus and pickled leek buds on wild garlic puree

Off-the-scale flavours will Lodge long in the memory

Rooted in Skye's landscape and traditions, Calum Montgomery transforms island bounty into an artful tasting menu at Edinbane Lodge, where heritage and modern dining meet. By Ailsa Sheldon

THE FOOD SCENE on Skye is booming, lead by a younger generation of Sgitheanachs firmly rooted in the landscape. Award-winning young Skye chef Calum Montgomery opened Edinbane Lodge in 2018 after he and his family renovated the derelict 16th century hunting lodge. This up-market small hotel and restaurant has been picking up accolades and devoted fans ever since, so this is a long-anticipated visit.

The handsome formal dining room honours its past, with wooden panelling, uplit portraits and bucolic rural scenes.

Contemporary trad music brings us into the present, and my evening is accompanied by Talisk, Mànran and Breabach – proudly Scottish but not twee. Dinner begins with crisps, made from seaweed and scallop roe, to avoid kitchen waste. I love a crisp, and these are outstanding, the texture like fresh prawn crackers with a deeper umami kick, dunked in a creamy oyster dip.

The house bread, somewhere between pan de cristal and ciabatta, crisp, chewy and addictive, arrives with two butters: rich milky and salted, and whipped with black garlic. A flurry of delicious little snacks appear. There's a delicate pastry shell filled with cool cured halibut, with calamansi gel and bright kampot pepper, the local fish enlivened by far-flung flavours. A deep-fried oyster is served in its shell with a scurvygrass garnish, and a potato hash brown with a smoky charcoal emulsion.

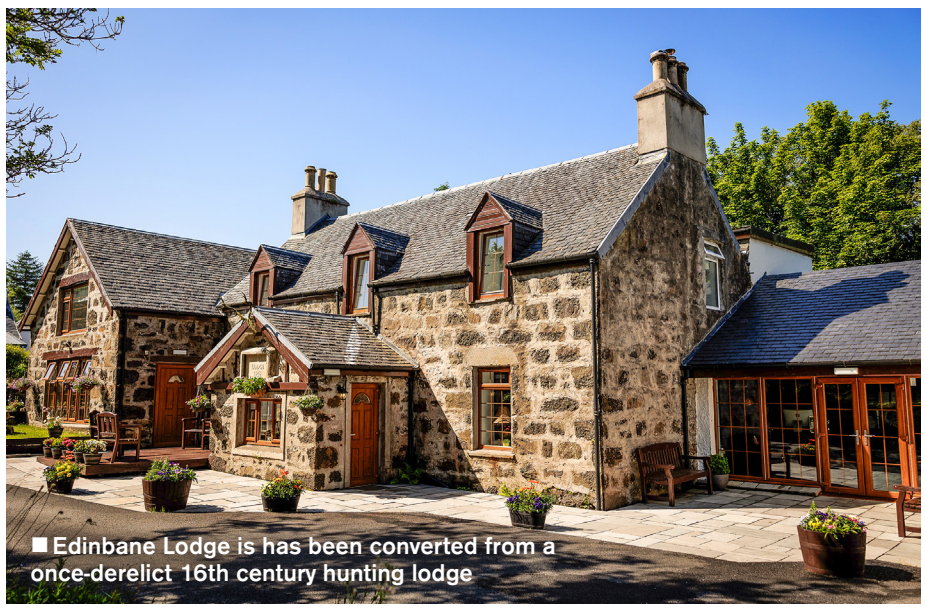
A tiny surf clam is one tasty slurp, with ginger, shallot and dill. There's a playfulness to the plating: a miniature cheese on toast (Isle of Mull cheddar royale with wild garlic dust on steamed brioche) is presented on a white marble plinth, worshipping optional but encouraged.



■ Right, Calum Montgomery

Calum's menu is called 'A Taste of Skye' and it's an ethos he's proud of: "If someone is coming to Skye once I want them to think about the landscape but also the food, and the quality of our produce," he tells me later.

"It means so much to be cooking with the same ingredients that my ancestors did, from the same land and water, with the same respect for every ingredient."



■ Edinbane Lodge is has been converted from a once-derelict 16th century hunting lodge

On the back of the menu are the distances ingredients have travelled to reach my plate, the foraged herbs, scallops landed at Edinbane, and garden produce are all a pleasing zero miles.

From Loch Greshornish to my plate, the biggest scallop I've ever seen arrives in a heavy marble dish: a throne fit for a queen. It's simply seared allowing the centre to stay sweet, juicy and tender, in an unctuous pool of smoked dulse butter sauce with tiny bobbing cucumber balls. This scallop alone is worth the long pot-hole dodging drive to Edinbane, it's glorious. Creel-caught lobster from the sound of Raasay gets a more elaborate treatment in the most intricate dish of the evening.

The chunky lobster is mixed with almonds and moulded into a dome, topped with a scoop of nutty caviar and a petalled dill lattice. A white wine cream sauce is split with dill oil, the bright green dots adding to the artistry of the dish. The dill and cream are classic flavours with lobster, the caviar and almond a compelling addition. For flavour, top marks, but I'm not sure that lobster this sweet and delicious needs all these accoutrements to shine.

The beautiful little fillet of hake that follows is simpler but exceptional. It comes with potato dauphinoise, (more a fancy potato croquette than the layered French classic), fat juicy spears of asparagus and pickled leek buds on wild garlic puree. The cheese course appears tiny in its enormous white platter, but it's big on flavour: a wedge of squidgy Clava brie with celery sorbet, apple jelly, truffled honey (from Liz's bees in Breakish), garnished with celery leaf.

Near the end of the menu is a dish called Falasgair, Gaelic for muirburn, the burning of heather to promote new vegetation growth. It's a distinctive smell, and one Calum missed in his time on the mainland. Growing up in Lochaber it was familiar to me too, but I hadn't thought about it for years. Until now.

A quenelle of burnt heather honey ice cream, a salted honey cracker, at the table a spritz of coastal Torabhaig whisky, and I'm transported. I'm back on my school bus watching the burning line of heather, then return to Edinbane where the sweet and acrid aromas are made pure pleasure in a bowl.

Deceptively simple, this is the work of a truly skilled chef who really knows his island, its produce, and how to create magic on a plate. ■

● ***Edinbane Lodge, Isle of Skye***
www.edinbanelodge.com