



Hugo, Voltaire and Oscar Wilde), and chocolate concept store and restaurant Un Dimanche à Paris, owned by chocolate maestro Pierre Cluizel, as well as the wonderful olive oil shop, Première Pression Provençal.

Sunday afternoon is spent in the charismatic company of chef Olivier Berté, who runs cookery courses aided by assistant Sophie, whose English, thankfully, is much, much better than my French. They aim to put us through our pastry paces and sharing tasks among our group of six, the flamboyant

Olivier sweeps aside any language barrier, ignoring our lack of expertise, to help us produce surprisingly professional choux puffs and chocolate-filled macaroons.

We leave the Berté kitchen full of good intentions to reclaim our dusty home blenders, clutching aprons, recipes and leftovers (who knows, we might need a snack before dinner), inspired by the passion the French have for food. Eating is a pleasure and Paris knows just how to let you enjoy yourself. □

DO NOT DISTURB TWIST & SPROUT YOGA AND RAW FOOD RETREAT, EASTWOOD HOUSE, DUNKELD

TWIST & Sprout is the remarkable union of a dynamic and inspiring pair of almost thirty-somethings, yoga teacher Susan Reynolds and raw food chef Lorna Crawford. They are pioneers in Scotland of three-day restorative retreats and one-day workshops extolling the values of bliss moments and a cleaner and more serene lifestyle. This is an opportunity to un-plug for a while, nothing about it is punishing. It's feasting rather than fasting, energising not exhausting, and sheer comfort rather than hair-shirted hell.

Think light-hearted days filled with food, yoga, walks, massage, music, sleep and many laughs. OK, you may miss coffee and a glass of red, but the results far outweigh these tiny sacrifices. Eastwood House, just outside Dunkeld, is the HQ, a newly-restored Victorian villa sitting on the river bank with the water rushing past, amid rose gardens, vegetable patches and herbaceous borders. Opposite is Birnam Woods, which played a part in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. As you enter, the warmth from the vast log burning stove in the hall hits you with almost as much kindness as the hostesses' welcome. Drop your shoulders, your bags and enjoy.

BUDGET OR BOUTIQUE?

Neither, it is like staying at a house party laid on by friends who have covered every possible desire and whim of those with a yearning to live a more organic country life. The house sleeps 16 and there is masses of space to chill out in the three public rooms downstairs. The look is Farrow & Ball walls, scrubbed wooden floors, roaring fires, deep, comfy sofas, lazy armchairs, and a vast dining table for all to share plus acres of books.

WORTH GETTING OUT OF BED FOR

The days start and end with yoga. Reynold's excellent tuition ensures that the morning class is dynamic and invigorating and the evening session restorative and relaxing - it includes a guided meditation and chanting. There are talks on yoga, raw diet and a food demonstration where you get to join in, plus one-to-one time if you like. Birnam Woods or the nearby Hermitage and Ossian Tower are within walking distance and there is also the ritual of jumping into the Tay for a blast of freshness.

ROOM SERVICE

Although the rooms are shared, you can request your own for a supplement. Each is decked out with seriously comfy beds, contemporary furniture, traditional fabrics and organic sheets, and locally-sourced flowers provide simple but divine decoration. Bathrooms are separate, there are more than enough to go round, and the endless supply of



piping hot water ensures the many deep Victorian roll top baths are always begging to be wallowed in.

LITTLE EXTRAS

Reynolds and Crawford love music and say it helps people to relate. With an enviable library they choose and play tracks to tie into what is happening during each stage of the retreat to match the mood of guests.

WINING AND DINING

It's all about hydration and getting the body alkalised - so you will be encouraged to drink and eat as much water, herbal tea, cold-pressed juices, smoothies, soups and greens as you can. The tempting seasonal, organic and locally sourced menus are planned to complement the yoga practice and the time of year. You will not go hungry since there is an abundance of tempting dishes. Everything is sugar, dairy and wheat-free, and it is remarkable what Crawford conjures up with her artist's-trained eye and a love of reinvention: pesto, pastas, avocado burgers, mushroom stacks, stir fry's, sushi, dips, granolas, torts, cheesecakes, macaroons and plenty more. Raw Chocolate is a huge part of the retreat; it's a staple of the diet and stimulates happiness, so not more than a few hours go past without a chocolate treat or drink.

GUESTBOOK COMMENTS

A clear head, feeling fit, strong and a little wiser is what I loved experiencing and it's all here. Suffice to say, over half of the punters I met were returning for their second or third foray into this Twist & Sprout world. □

Rachel Muddows

Twist & Sprout's next event is at Eastwood House: Three-Day Retreat 2-4 January, 2015, £390, and an autumn date has yet to be released, www.twistsandsprout.co.uk