

# Secret service

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'Pop-up restaurants are popping up, literally, everywhere – in people's homes, empty shops, university colleges'

**I** WENT to a secret supper on Friday night at a pop-up restaurant in someone's house!

Invited by a friend, we paid £25 a head up front, provided our own booze and had to arrive at a designated address for dinner. It was such a treat!

We walked there, drank champagne in the candle-lit garden, were led through to a beautifully-laid dining room in someone's home, met a whole new bunch of people and were treated to five sublime courses cooked by a well-known caterer.

And what a feast ensued: an amuse bouche of mushroom and truffle bisque with parmesan and paprika biscuits, sticky duck leg with ginger and cucumber tagliatelle, asparagus in puff pastry with berry sauce for the vegetarians, roasted sea bass fillet with salsa verde and roasted vegetables, a cheese platter with fruits and

**KATHERINE MACALISTER enjoys the thrill and the gastronomic delights on offer at her first secret supper**

hedgerow jam, a new season trio of strawberry desserts including a sorbet to die for, and coffee and home-made chocolates, before we staggered off again at 11.30pm, shoes in hand.

Impeccably done, we had our own waitress for the night, menus on the table and a list of the locally sourced ingredients and their suppliers.

The cheese for example came from the Oxford Cheese Company in the Covered Market, bread from The Natural Bread Company in Woodstock, the chocolates from Henley, the meat from Freemans Butchers in Woodstock and the fish from Haymans Fisheries again in the Covered Market. Beat that for a gourmet night out.

Compared with the scene that meets my eyes when hosting suppers at my house, staggering down the stairs the next morning with a hangover from hell to be met by a sight that would stun most bomb specialists, it was a joy to eat elsewhere.

No shopping, no cooking, no washing up, no tidying, no shame-faced bottle bank ferrying, and you can entertain six to 12 of your friends, without having to take out a second mortgage. Plus, everyone has a great time, there's the novelty factor thrown in for good measure, a new menu each time, and you get to meet an entire table full of new faces.

You can see why pop-up restaurants are doing such a roaring trade.

And they are popping up, literally, everywhere, in people's homes, empty shops, university colleges.

Oxford, for example, has taken over premises on Magdalen Road in East Oxford having started up secret suppers at one of the chef's homes, and was overwhelmed by demand.

For the caterers in question it's also a win-win.

They can cook without leaving home, halving costs, and time, while still making a hefty profit. And it bides them over the winter months when their diaries aren't full of weddings.

But be careful which secret supper you go to.

Other friends have had less salubrious and much more amateur experiences than ours elsewhere.

So go for the best, and in the meantime, don't expect to be invited over to mine any time soon!

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