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How we started our fondue restaurant



Outside, the perfect English cottage

SWISS women, as we have read in "Women's Observer", seem to make a habit of coming to Britain to start thriving businesses. This month Esther Tilley-Ris, who came from her home town of Berne to London six years ago, celebrates her first year in business at Anne's House - the only fondue restaurant in Kent. She writes:

WHEN I came to England I worked in London as a courier for a Swiss travel agency. That is where I met Richard, my husband, who worked in

London as a hotel manager. We were married a year and a half later, and Richard accepted a job in the Caribbean.

While out there I worked for the local photographer. This had been my profession, as I had qualified in Berne where I worked and where I was born. We stayed in the Caribbean for three years and then decided to return to England to start a restaurant of our own.

Richard comes from the Canterbury area, so we decided to concentrate our

search for premises there. We looked at several established restaurants but finally set our heart on a beautiful 17th century house in Bridge, a small village outside Canterbury. It was a private house and we converted it ourselves into a restaurant.

I have always had a flair for cooking and Richard, who completed part of his professional training in Berne and Zermatt, makes a very charming waiter.

Our two restaurant rooms, with their old fireplaces, brick walls and beamed ceilings, make ideal surroundings to enjoy a Swiss cheese fondue or the two meat fondues, Bourguignonne and Chinoise.

To start the meal, we offer Buendnerteller or the smoked salmon pâté, and our desserts include Emental winecake, Basler Klostertorte, Engadiner Nusstorte and avocado ice cream. We have a selection of French, German and Italian wines and a Swiss Dôle and Fendant.

In the afternoons we are open for clotted cream teas, followed for example by Linzertorte or Aarguer Rueblitorte.

The British, who are in general rather sceptical about trying new dishes, have responded remarkably well to fondue. I must say that Richard is very good at convincing them to give the fondues a try. He also explains to them how to eat a cheese fondue, telling them how to stick the crusty bread on the fork so that we don't get those disappointed guests - as we have seen elsewhere - who tip their whole basket of breadcubes into the cheese and then try to fish them out.

We do warn diners about the traditional penalties for losing your bread or meat in the fondue pot - ladies should kiss all the men at the table and gentlemen should buy a round of drinks or a bottle of wine.

Of course, we do get some customers who don't dare try these weird foreign dishes and stick to their favourite steak. But once they have seen how much the people at the neighbouring tables enjoy themselves they invariably promise to come back and try our fondues.



Inside, Richard (left) and Esther (right) enjoy a Fondue Bourguignonne with friends