

There's a new pasta maestro in town

Ben Parker is let into the secrets of Angela Harnett's kitchen on a one-day cookery course at Lime Wood hotel

Remember," says chef Luke Holder, leaning casually on a marble counter. "It's not about fine dining. It's about fun dining." A cheeky smile flashes from his bearded face, long hair swept behind his ears.

I stand among a group of 10, wearing crisp white aprons, an iridescent gilthead bream in hand. Minutes before, I'd been shown how to fillet it. Then I remember how I'm outshone in the culinary department by a friend's son, aged 10, who easily whips up fresh pasta. I spy Angela Harnett, Michelin-starred chef-patron of Mayfair's Murano, watching us from the corner; this doesn't help with nerves.

I'm on a new cookery course at Lime Wood hotel, the Regency-style manor at Lyndhurst in the New Forest. For a day trip, it's just over two hours from London. If you're looking for a longer break, gorgeous rooms start at £315. Luke and Angela share head chef duties at the hotel's restaurant, Hartnett Holder & Co, where you dine on Anglo-Italian "cucina-style" fare, cosseted by charming staff, avoiding stuffiness despite the grand surroundings.

This lack of pretension permeates through to HH&Co backstage. Iain Longhorn, previously of the Chesil Rectory in



Winchester, leads the courses, though Luke and Angela run a limited number of sessions themselves (otherwise they'll chat to guests if they're at the property). Iain stresses that it's not an old-fashioned cookery school – no lectures from the blackboard.

Casual demonstrations, peppered with anecdotes, convince me that this dip into behind-the-scenes Lime Wood is accessible, whether you're a novice or maestro. "We don't want people thinking they have to bow down to the gods of food," Luke tells us.

I first dispatched a lobster to crustacean nirvana before boiling, shelling and chopping it, adding mango and Lime Wood's own smoked salmon, it formed a perfect lobster salad starter.

I then placed my filleted bream in a casserole, on a layer of tomato sauce and lobster bisque, stretching flatbread dough across as

What's cooking?
Luke Holder and Angela Harnett in the grounds of the Lime Wood hotel

the lid. After 14 minutes in the oven, it was golden brown and sprinkled with rosemary. Slicing open the bread, a plume of steam was released, perfuming the room, unveiling soft white fish and a rich sauce.

In the afternoon, Angela shared the secret of her "rich man's pasta". Using nine egg yolks, I made ravioli filled with ricotta.

Though still a little off the Lime Wood standard, I spent the next weekend offering to fillet fish for anyone. Importantly, I can now tell 10-year-old Danny that there's a new farfalle maker in town. But with a course for children also on the menu at Lime Wood, the heat is on.

Lime Wood, New Forest (02380 287 177; limewoodhotel.co.uk) offers full day cookery courses from £195pp; half day sessions £120 per person. To read the full review, see: telegraph.co.uk/limewood