

Beer at the heart of *country pub*

Mark Dorber is passionate about good food, good wine and - above all else - good beer. **Claire Holmes** visited his newest project, The Swan at Stratford St Mary, to find out more

Matching food with beer isn't exactly something new, but beer - and the way it can elevate the taste of different dishes - has certainly started to grip the nation in recent years.

Whether it's because the drink itself has improved, because there's a record number of breweries opening or simply because we as a nation have become more open to the idea of drinking beer, it definitely seems to be the thing of the moment.

And, it's something that Mark Dorber has been extolling the virtues of for years.

The beer sommelier, who owns both The Anchor at Walberswick and The Swan at Stratford St Mary,

has an appetite for excellence and loves being able to showcase the very best of what the world has to offer in relation to food and drink.

His two businesses embody this passion in a very real way - and you only have to look behind the bar or at the menu to see this.

To those who are interested in food and drink, Mark's name may ring a bell - and so it should. He is well known as the man who helped transform one of the UK's best pubs into a haven for diverse, interesting and excellent food and drink.

Indeed, during the 25 or so years that Mark was involved in The White Horse at Parsons Green - affectionately known as the Slooney Pony - he helped bring it world-fame through paying close attention to what it kept in the cellar and behind the bar.

Under Mark's direction, the business built up a strong reputation for its portfolio of cask and bottle beers from across the world and won a long list of accolades, including the sought-after title of Britain's best pub.

Mark is also one of the founders of the Beer



■ The team at the Swan in Stratford St Mary - Ed Razzall, Jane and Mark Dorber and Steven Miles.

Photos: SU ANDERSON

Academy - an independent educational trust which is aligned to the Institute of Brewing and Distilling and designed to help people understand beer.

The appeal of Suffolk - combined with a need to be closer to his wife's family - brought Mark and his other half Sophie to The Anchor in Walberswick in 2004 and they eventually left the London business in 2007. The Swan at Stratford is their latest venture.

The pair took over the 16th century pub in March 2012, spending nearly 10 months renovating and refurbishing the building and its grounds before opening it to the public. It's now run by Mark's sister Jane and assistant manager Ed Razzall, although Mark and Sophie are very much involved.

Mark's desire to run a pub in this part of the country dates back to the years that he was commuting from The Anchor in Walberswick to The White Horse in London and used to pass this area with longing. He's pleased to have finally made the dream a reality.

"When this came on the market it seemed like a very good project," he enthused. "The White Horse was challenge number one, The Anchor was challenge number two and this is challenge number three."

On the day I visited, the sun was shining and the village was bathed in glorious light - showcasing the area's quaint beauty perfectly.

The timber-framed Swan sits on a large plot of land, just literally across the road from the picturesque River Stour.

A lot of work has gone into detangling the mass of brambles which used to sit behind the pub,



Eating and drinking at The Swan Inn

Mark picks five dishes from the Swan's menu and suggests what to drink alongside them

Dish:

Marinated herring with roast and pickled beetroot, horseradish cream and chive oil

Matched beer: Früh Kölsch, Cologne, Germany

Mark says: This is the definitive Kölsch - a subtle hybrid of ale fruitiness and round clean lager sophistication. Pale gold in colour with a good lasting head and persistent effervescence, the hoppy, dry finish is intensely appetising with a touch of mineral dryness and noble hop aromas. The lovely clean mineral backbone is a perfect foil for the powerful herring flavours without drawing out any of the metallic flavours in this dish.

Or for something different try: a glass of Aalborg Akvavit



Dish:

Pig's head croquette with parsley, caper and raisin salad

Matched beer: Schneider Weisse Original, Kelheim, Germany

Mark says: This is the 'Rolls-Royce' of German wheat beers. Aromas of bananas and cloves and fabulous effervescence make this the ultimate picnic beer as well as a good choice with pig's head. Schneider is a dark amber (Dunkel) wheat beer and has the body to match the pork, the clove spiciness to match the capers and a touch of banana sweetness to complement the raisins in the salad. Three atmospheres of carbonation give persistent spritz and a refreshing finish.

If you prefer wine: go for a glass of Trimbach Gewurztraminer

Mark says: Trimbach Gewurztraminer (Gewurz, of course means spicy in German) is spicy, rich and full-bodied and enjoys working against the well developed flavour of the pork, teasing out the fruit flavours in this dish.



Dish:

Bitter chocolate and salted caramel tart with Marybelle crème fraiche

Beer matched:

Rocheport 10, Rocheport, Belgium

Mark says: This is a strong, dark, profound Trappist beer in the old ale style with aromas of vanilla and dark chocolate and rich, lingering chocolate malt flavours. The dual yeast strain and long bottle ageing confer a very complex set of flavours and an ultra subtle carbonation that gently removes the chocolate from the taste buds finishing clean, long and well balanced.

