

PROMOTION



Sally Elcoate and chef Angus Dunlop

# Thrings Eats...

with Sally Elcoate, Ginger Catering Company

After a 20-year catering career working for other people, Sally Elcoate decided to strike out on her own. She talks to Sue Cornall, a Legal Director at the Romsey office of the law firm Thrings, about what happened next.

Sally Elcoate remembers the moment she had a revelation that would change her life. After two decades working in hotels and catering around the New Forest, she realised at the end of 2015 that she wanted to make a change.

"I grew up in hospitality, but it was always working on someone else's terms," she recalls. "I started off as a waitress at The Master Builder's and six years later I was running the hotel.

"I worked at some big places - the University of Southampton, Southampton Football Club, and at a large catering company - but I decided I wanted to focus on the part of the job I enjoyed the most, which was events. I needed to do something for myself - I wanted to look back on my life and say 'I created that, I did that'."

Not one to do things by halves, Sally left her job, a long relationship and her home and started again. She and her business partner at the time founded Ginger Catering with "two simple ingredients - good food delivered by excellent service."



Sue Cornall,  
Thrings

The business, based at Hythe Marina Village, is now established as a creative caterer for weddings, corporate events for clients including Thrings, and private celebrations.

Sally, along with head chef Angus Dunlop and her team, pride themselves on using local suppliers, from New Forest beef, pork and lamb to watercress, strawberries and trout produced in the region.

Faced with the mass cancellation or postponement of events during the Coronavirus lockdown, Ginger Catering ran a limited pop-up service at Hythe Marina Village but kept in touch with suppliers. "I've never felt closer to them," says Sally. "Reaching out and talking to other food businesses in Hampshire and Dorset, there really is a feeling of all being in this together and it's created a lovely mutual vibe - everyone wants to help each other."

Inspiration comes from visiting restaurants, following food trends and travel. Sally prides herself on getting to know every client and interpreting their brief to produce stunning results - even when that can be a challenge.

"We had one couple who loved fast food but wanted fine dining for their wedding," she recalls. "They wanted their favourite fast food adapted into the fine dining experience, so we made versions of Nando's, KFC and McDonald's for them, all with our own twist. Our job is to adapt the brief so that we not only keep the client happy, but also deliver good food. We've got an event coming up



in a few weeks where the theme means everything has to be square. We're working on that one..."

At the heart of Ginger Catering's philosophy is the sense of responsibility Sally and the team feel when they are taking care of a big day for a couple, individual or business. "People have to put their faith in us, to trust us to deliver. They can come in for a tasting of the food, but you can't sample the day itself, so the fear of disappointment drives me to always think two or three steps ahead. It's only the next day I reflect on it and think that it went well!"

Like any business owner, Sally has had to overcome challenges and admits to having the odd "dark day" since she began - but no regrets. "It feels like a whirlwind, but if you have enthusiasm and passion it lights sparks in other people. I've never worked so hard in my life - but I wouldn't have it any other way." ♦



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