

**WILLIAM "BILLY" DRABBLE  
KNOWS WHAT HE WANTS. HE  
WANTS HIS MICHELIN STAR BACK.  
AND HE'S GOING TO GET IT.  
ERIK BROWN REPORTS**

Here's a prediction: Seven Park Place in St James's will pick up a Michelin star next year. After an hour with chef William Drabble, I'd put money on it. And before anybody opens a book, you'd better know that it's a pretty safe bet.

William has had a Michelin star for the past 12 years, and has been very carefully positioned in the kitchen of the St James's Hotel and Club by MD Henrik Muehle to get one there.

You can tell he's going to do it sooner or later, and probably sooner. A softly-spoken Liverpoolian, William is passionate about cooking and simplicity and consistency and ingredients and freshness.

The fact that the kitchen in the hotel is quite small becomes an advantage. A lack of storage means turnover is quick – "it's in and it's out" – and the ingredients fresh.

Get William talking about the ingredients and it's almost poetic: hand-dived scallops from Scotland, off the boat at 3am and into William's kitchen by 9am, still throbbing; Lune Valley lamb that is "incredibly consistent"; the Cumbrian butcher who makes the sausages and cures the bacon for breakfast; the day boats at Brixham and Poole that bring in William's fish.

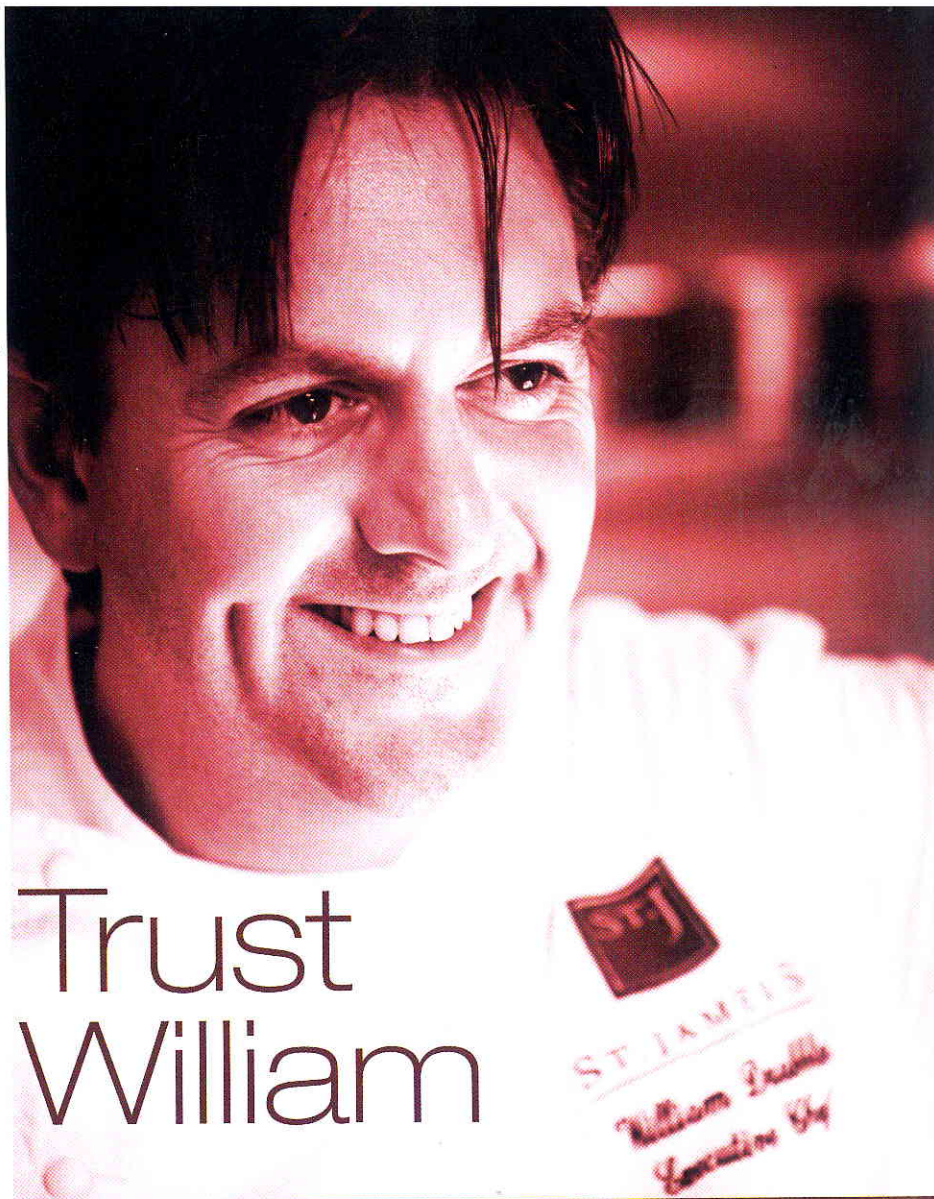
Get him talking about his work, and he'll say in that gentle Norfolk-inflected Scouse: "It's not a job. It's something you love. It's a passion."

To top it all, he is the most gracious chef I've ever met, with kind words for everybody: Tom Aikens "lovely bloke"; Gordon Ramsay, whom William followed into the hot seat at Aubergine, "they were big boots to step into"; and everybody else, from his gran, who inspired him, and his college lecturer in Norfolk to Phillip Vogel, who was head chef at St James's Hotel & Club when William took over last August – "a great help – he'll do well".

At one point he says, "I'm not one who comes in and screams and shouts ...". And it's easy to believe. Listening again to the recording of our conversation is strangely calming: it isn't usually.

Take a look at the menu for lunch at Seven Park Place by William Drabble, to give it its full title, and you'll see things like galette of pig's head with roasted langoustine, shallot and caper dressing, confit salmon, tarte tatin of endive, red wine and tarragon, and white chocolate parfait with bottled cherries. Modern French, Michelin standard food at £24.50 for two courses, £29.50 for three.

"I suppose people are going to be getting a bargain for a year," William says, without a trace of immodesty. But then he's been a Michelin-starred chef for a long time, and admits to feeling odd without a star. "You cook what you cook, what else can you do?" he asks, shrugging.



## Trust William

### Drabble's journey to Seven Park Place

College in Norwich with Tom Aikens.

Three years at the Mirabelle at The Grand in Eastbourne, with Tom Aikens, Keith Mitchell and Neil Wiggins.

One and a half years at The Capital Hotel in Basil Street, Knightsbridge, with Philip Britain.

Three years with Nico Ladenis at Chez Nico on Park Lane, with Jeff Galvin and André Gaëret.

One year with "incredibly talented" Tom Aikens at Pied à Terre, "so hard it was nuts".

One year at Michael's Nook, Grassmere in the Lake District. Started in August, picked up a Michelin star in January.

Eleven years at Aubergine in Chelsea. Started in September after a call from Tom Aikens, got a star in January.

Joined St James's Hotel & Club in August, with Seven Park Place by William Drabble opening a little too late for the 2010 Michelin awards.

