

# The Cloud Hotel

## Encore gets a new look

**The Cloud Hotel has unveiled a new look for its popular restaurant Encore, part of its owner's commitment to maintaining the highest standards and attracting new trade.**

The Brockenhurst hotel continues to build upon its star quality. Avril Owton had the décor refreshed in winter and is delighted with the results. In keeping with the hotel's theatrical memorabilia, which dates from her Tiller Girl stage career, she renamed the 40-cover restaurant in 2008. With the conservatory giving excellent views of the gardens, both this and Encore provide an ideal meeting venue for lunch, morning coffee or afternoon cream teas. "We're fortunate to have a loyal client base and strong local trade," said Avril. "This is something we want to build upon, attracting new customers, whether they are passing through, coming to stay at the hotel, or living nearby and trying somewhere different for lunch or dinner." Avril has built her business on uncompromising quality combined with value and exemplary customer service. "In the current climate it is even more important for a business to focus on what its core market really wants – and to deliver it," she added. "I believe there will be plenty of opportunities to welcome foreign tourists to the New Forest National Park this year, as well as people staying at home due to the weak pound, and a quality experience will ensure they return," she said. "I have great hopes for this year as an hotelier; the reason I am constantly refurbishing the hotel is to maintain standards."

## By Royal appointment

**New Forest hotelier Avril Owton received her MBE from Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor.**

Avril, owner of The Cloud Hotel at Brockenhurst and retiring chairman of The Hampshire and Isle of Wight branch of the Institute of Directors (IoD), was thrilled by the recognition, which was awarded for her services to hospitality and charities in Hampshire, and announced in the 2008 Queen's Birthday Honours. She travelled to Windsor for the investiture, watched by her four children – Graeme Owton, Helen Owton, Amanda Smallbone, Emma Owton – whilst her mother, Joan Bebbington, joined the family after the ceremony for a celebration lunch. "Windsor Castle is really beautiful and I felt immensely proud. It was the most fantastic day, and everyone was so friendly," commented Avril, who added Her Majesty asked about the hotel and remarked what a beautiful area the New Forest was. A successful hotelier, author and international speaker, Avril is no stranger to awards. With a string of tourism, business and leisure awards for herself and



her hotel, she published her first book in 2007 and relaunched the business support group she originally founded in 2003, the Wessex Women's Network. She tirelessly supports local and national charities, including Oakhaven Hospice Trust, Alzheimer's carers at Netley Marsh and Macmillan Cancer Support.

## Confusion over ratings

**Avril Owton has criticised a tourism move to all 'star' ratings as diamonds become redundant. "Stars are meaningless to many people and create confusion," she explained.**

"We are a two star hotel by virtue of size under the AA Hotel Recognition Scheme, but offer accommodation and service

which always amazes guests. A B&B can now be two star and call itself an hotel when it does not have the 82% quality assessment that we have behind it. "It works against us, because the public are not aware of the percentage. I feel strongly that the whole star system encourages misrepresentation."

# Praise!

Management Today reviewed Avril's first book *Delighting Your Customers* (A&C Black) and praised it with 3 stars as 'best of its kind' saying: "Part of the excellent series 'Business on a Shoestring', this gives vital advice on pleasing your customer without breaking the bank. Written for small-business owners, it's brimming with customer service delights, covering everything from understanding your customers' expectations to handling their complaints. A high-energy, high-impact book written by a dancer-turned-hotelier."

## Charity dinner

The Cloud Hotel's 2008 charity Christmas dinner, the 25th such event, took place two days after Avril's investiture and raised £2,165 for Macmillan Cancer Support. 60 local people enjoyed a traditional festive dinner with carols sung by the Highcliffe Junior Choir. "The spirit of Christmas starts with this event and I must thank everyone who has so generously supported me over the years, especially Anne Dow and my staff," said Avril. This year's dinner takes place on December 13. The Highcliffe Junior Choir will be performing again. Please book early to avoid disappointment.

## Chairman steps down

Avril Owton has concluded two busy years as chairman of The Hampshire and Isle of Wight branch of the Institute of Directors (IoD). "It's been a fascinating insight into so many business sectors and I have enjoyed many events and flying the flag for our regional branch. I remain a committed member of the organisation," she said.

## Madame Speaker

In stepping down from her IoD role, Avril will be devoting more time to public speaking engagements with local organisations.

She is a popular speaker, who focuses on encouraging women to reach their full potential through telling her own story and sharing experiences. Depending on her audience, she also looks at business development and turning around an ailing business, drawing on her own career as an hotelier.

"I really enjoy it, and it brings in business for the hotel. New guests become repeat customers, which is very rewarding," she said.

## Cream tea

This year's Hampshire Food Festival, organised by county food group Hampshire Fare, runs throughout July. The Cloud Hotel is supporting the event by hosting a traditional cream team on July 12, with scones by Linzi of Lymington.

This year's proceeds will be shared between the Rainbow Centre in Fareham and Naomi House at Winchester. The former has specialists in conductive education and helps children with cerebral palsy throughout the South, whilst the latter is the children's hospice for Berkshire, Dorset, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Wiltshire and the fringes of West Sussex and Surrey.

Contact the hotel on 01590 622165 to book or enquire about other forthcoming events.

[www.hampshirefare.co.uk](http://www.hampshirefare.co.uk)

## New initiative

Ever keen to encourage new business, especially in a more challenging economic climate, The Cloud Hotel is offering traditional tea parties and reception buffets with a set price per head.

They are suitable for christenings, birthdays, anniversaries, small weddings (maximum 30 people), retirement parties or funeral receptions.



"We want to provide a more personal setting and atmosphere than perhaps other venues people might consider for a small get together – do come and talk to us about this new option," added Avril.

For further information – and these MUST be booked in advance – telephone 01590 622165 or email [enquiries@cloudhotel.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@cloudhotel.co.uk)

## WWN welcomes speakers

The Wessex Women's Network (WWN), established by Avril Owton in 2003 to promote business contacts through regular events at the hotel with visiting speakers, is enjoying a busy 2009.

Guest speakers have included weather and radio presenter Alina Jenkins, the BBC's Sally Taylor and Bob Champion. Future speakers include Wave 105's Connie Cox, Lady Montagu of Beaulieu and nutritionist Barbara Cox.



135 members have now joined and come from an area covering Bournemouth and the New Forest. They meet approximately every six weeks.

[www.wessexwomensnetwork.co.uk](http://www.wessexwomensnetwork.co.uk)

## Everywoman judge

Avril is a judge for the NatWest Everywoman Awards, which take place in December. They celebrate inspirational businesswomen who have achieved significant success – particularly those who've overcome adversity in the form of financial constraints, social disadvantage or skills gaps.

"I meet so many inspirational women through this," she commented.

## Oakhaven event

Avril will be chairing the annual Women of our Time luncheon for the Oakhaven Hospice Trust, at Chewton Glen on October 30. In line with a succession of high profile keynote speakers, including Ann Widdecombe MP last year, she is looking forward to the event; the speaker will be announced in August.