

the tablefoodies

GETTY IMAGES

Eat my words Alex Renton



My experience of London? Pride came before offal

I lived in London for half my life but I approach the city now with flutters in the stomach. A committed vegetarian I know who leaves the West Country twice a year for the Smoke says that, faced with the urban challenge, he lapses. He goes straight from Paddington Station to Burger King for a meat protein blast. Arriving last week from Scotland, I went — in the same spirit — directly to a Bayswater pub for a pint of much-missed southern bitter. Relieving me without a smile of almost £4, the barman asked me to take off my cap “for security reasons”. It isn’t Leith.

But there are joys. Fuller’s London Pride. A chilli-sauce-laden doner kebab stuffed into pitta bread in Shepherds Bush. Neal’s Yard’s organic Greek yoghurt. A stroll through Borough Market. And, of course, there are restaurants.

I had a long list to check out — the product of months of gossip and review-reading — but I only got to three, none of them new (even The Table’s columnists can’t jump the queue into Heston’s Dinner). The poshest was Richard Corrigan’s place in Mayfair, just off Grosvenor Square — a big treat for a fan of his oyster/grill bar, Bentley’s, and his rumbustious cookbook, *The Clatter of Forks and Spoons*.

Lunch was paid for; organised by the Slow Food campaign and Booths, a remarkable and brave little supermarket chain in the North of England.

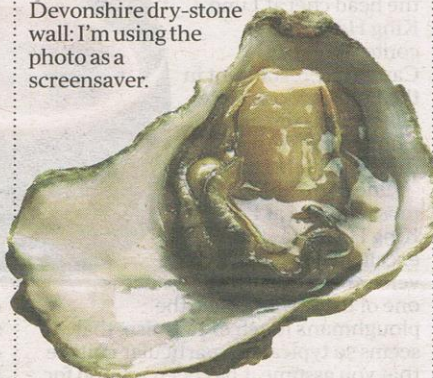
The theme was “Forgotten Foods”. We ate happily through a list of British delights: Morecambe Bay potted shrimp, Herdwick mutton, damsons from Lyth Valley in Cumbria, and cobnuts. I haven’t eaten those since I was

a child — a little green on the crunch, more interesting than hazelnuts, they are the flavour of early autumn hedge-scavenging as much as blackberries. But the best titbit was not forgotten at all — it was, in fact, a celebrated jewel of the Corrigan repertoire, a rock oyster on its half shell, drowned in a cucumber and caviar jelly. We only got one. Huh. But the recipe is printed on the right.

After the security incident in Bayswater, I went to check out Rowley Leigh’s gorgeous-looking Parisian brasserie at Whiteleys’ Le Café Anglais, in Bayswater. It bustles, but it doesn’t quite have the sexy throb of Leigh’s great canteen of the 1990s and early 2000s, Kensington Place. The food was surprisingly underwhelming: a boudin of pike starter just bland, and my griddled calf’s liver nothing very special. Better than the Ivy, though.

My top dish — and top experience — was at a modest-seeming canteen in East London, run by the chef and art-world caterer Margot Henderson. She opened it principally for the small businesses that reside alongside hers at Rochelle School, a converted primary school just east of Liverpool Street. There are just half-a-dozen tables and an open kitchen in a long shed in the playground, with a menu of back-to-basics pleasures — deep-fried sand eels and tartare sauce, roast shallots with goat curds, a confit of pig’s cheek and celeriac.

Starters cost around £6, mains £8–£13; all served as plain as at the monastery refectory. I loved the pigeon and foie gras terrine, unusually coarse with great, tasty birdmeat lumps and gobbets of fat in it. It looked like a Devonshire dry-stone wall: I’m using the photo as a screensaver.



Richard Corrigan’s oysters in cucumber jelly

INGREDIENTS

6 oysters, open
1 cucumber
1 leaf gelatine
1 tbsp caviar (or a substitute such as Avruga)

METHOD

Peel cucumber into long strips, including skin but no seeds. Sprinkle with salt and blitz in food processor. Pass liquid through fine sieve. Soak one leaf of gelatine in cold water. Squeeze after 5 minutes. Warm one tablespoon of cucumber liquid and melt gelatine. Pour mixture back into cucumber water to make about 150ml and cool over ice. Remove oysters from shell and reserve in the cucumber liquid. Wash shell thoroughly. Place an oyster into each shell and pour over enough cucumber liquid to cover. Place in the refrigerator until lightly set. Place a little caviar over each oyster and serve immediately.

T More great recipes for oysters at thetimes.co.uk/recipes