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FOR TWO

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Vanilla blueberry cheesecake page 8

The readers' issue 2011

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MENU

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for friends



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ICE CREAM

- *lime sorbet
- *butterscotch
- *strawberry coconut ice

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2011
part 3
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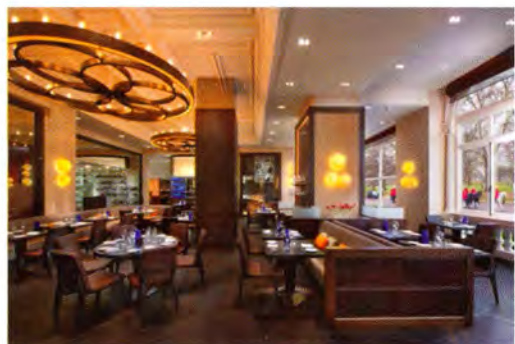
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TO CUT OUT
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pro vs punter

Professional critics know their stuff, but if recognised might get special treatment.* So how does their experience compare with the average diner's? **olive** reader Anne Giacomantonio and Tom Parker Bowles compare notes on Dinner by Heston Blumenthal

DINNER BY HESTON BLUMENTHAL



Heston Blumenthal's first London restaurant was one of the most anticipated openings of recent years. Menus are based on historic British dishes researched by the world-renowned chef and his team. The dining room features floor-to-ceiling glass walls, giving diners a view of the kitchen and its unique pulley system. Modelled after a version used by the royal court, the pulley's workings look like the intricate parts of an oversize watch and serve to rotate the spit on an open-fire. Dinner's kitchen is headed up by Ashley Palmer-Watts, former head chef at The Fat Duck.

■ Mandarin Oriental, Hyde Park, 66 Knightsbridge, London SW1 (020 7201 3833; dinnerbyheston.com). Starters £13.50-£16; mains £23-£34; desserts £9-£12. Set lunch, £28 for three courses.

- Pushy table turning? No, but there's a high demand for tables. The restaurant takes bookings a month in advance.
- Tap water offered? Yes.
- Veggie options? Limited.

SCORES IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS

Restaurant	Food	Atmosphere	Service	Total
Les Deux Salons	18	19	16	53/60
Pollen St Social	18	16	18	52/30
Dishoom	17	17	17	51/60
Barbecoa	18	17	16	51/60
Princi	13	16	15	44/60
Tapas Revolution	14	11	15	40/60

THE PRO



Tom Parker Bowles is a TV presenter and food writer. His book, *Full English: A Journey Through the British and Their Food*, is on sale now (£12.99, Ebury Press; **olive** offer £10.99, with free p&p. Call 01872 562313).

*Tom was recognised on his visit.

THE PUNTER



Anne Giacomantonio works in London as an information officer. She eats out around three times a month. Her best ever eating out experience was at Petersham Nurseries in Richmond, Surrey, and her guilty pleasure is licking the wooden mixing spoon.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Dinner is Heston Blumenthal's first foray into the Big Smoke. I visited twice and on both occasions there was a palpable buzz and sense of excitement humming through the dining room. The restaurant is imbued with a sense of theatre, in the best possible sense; a gleaming kitchen takes centre stage and vast, lofty windows gaze out onto Hyde Park. It's a space designed for comfortable, elegant eating rather than corporate dining, with pudding moulds hanging from the walls and enough space to stretch out and properly feast.

After a few calls to the booking line and the, supposed, addition to a waiting list (that failed to ever yield a booking), I eventually scored a weekday late lunch slot via the website – a month in advance and three months after opening. Perched at the bar, with a very expensive Campari and soda, we had ample time to survey the bright dining room set before us with floor to ceiling windows and an expansive view of Hyde Park.

SERVICE

The first time I went was before the official opening, for a preview lunch. Service was professional, if a little persistent. We were talked through the menu in great detail, only for another bright-eyed waiter to come over and do the same. But this was before the place had opened. Two weeks later, after the official opening, it had settled down. Our waiter was charming, sharp and knew his stuff – there when we needed him and not given to hovering around the table. I was recognised by Ashley, as I know him.

Service was swift and attentive, and help was at hand with the explanation of dishes and vegetarian options. The sommelier was happy to point us in the direction of wines that would complement our meal and his advice was spot on. Tap water was provided and topped up throughout the meal without having to prompt. Altogether faultless.



THE FOOD

The food is historic British rather than the usual post-modern brilliance one associates with The Fat Duck. So, each dish comes with a date and even a 'source of origin', be it Meg Dodd's scallops and cucumber ketchup, or John Nott's bone marrow. From the very first bite, I fell in lust.

This is food to make you sigh with delight. Salamagundy mixes soft chicken oysters, wobbling bone marrow and crisp salad leaves to magical effect, with a hint of horseradish and vinegar adding balance and kick – it's one of the best dishes I've ever eaten. Rice and flesh (like a risotto Milanese) was similarly stunning; a perfect saffron risotto studded with unctuous shards of calf tail. The spicing was spot on, with just a whisper of saffron, and the texture sublime.

And on it went, one dish as beautiful as the next. Cod in cider matched sweet fish and bivalve with a sauce that not only seduced the taste buds but held them in its eternal thrall. Sirloin steak, garnished with great blobs of bone marrow, was A-list beef and beautifully cooked. As for the tipsy cake - there's brioche, then there's Dinner by Heston brioche. Quite sublime, just like everything else.

I was very keen to try some of the signature dishes, so ordered the meat fruit starter, and tipsy cake dessert without even glancing at the menu. The meat fruit was everything it has been billed as; a perfectly formed fruit, which yielded a soft, rich and umami-packed liver parfait. It's quite a generous portion once piled on to the toast – but it didn't take me long to eat. My partner, who is vegetarian, found it much harder to find menu options but with a little help, he chose the broth of lamb (minus the lamb or sweetbreads of course). His verdict was tasty, but hardly the height of excitement.

For my main, I ordered cod in cider with 'fired' mussels and chard. The sizable piece of seared cod sat in a sweet, brothy sauce that complemented the salty mussels and freshly wilted greens. We also tried braised celery with a thick, parmesan sauce and a salad of pickled walnuts, apple and onion. Desserts were fantastic. Tippy cake was slow roasted pineapple with a beautifully presented bun-cake and thin, custard-like ooze: utterly delicious. Brown bread ice-cream was one of the most astonishingly pleasant things I've ever eaten, with its sweet, crumbly biscuit base and drizzle of syrup.

THE VERDICT

This place had a lot to live up to. Anyone expecting Fat Duck style trickery could be disappointed, but I defy anyone eating here to walk out of the restaurant filled with anything but joy. This is some of the best cooking in Britain. Ingredients, recipe, technique and presentation all combine to create food that enraptures the palate and makes the spirits soar. Seriously. And prices are surprisingly sensible. Beg, steal or bully your way to a table here. It's up there with the very best.

Overall, Dinner was a lovely experience, but not really my style. It's only a small thing but after seeing the wonderful panorama of Hyde Park, we were led to what seemed to be the only table hiding behind a pillar. The food and service, room and attention given to diners was lovely – the only thing missing was the view.

THE BILL

■ Tom's bill for two: £178.98

Three starters, one main, two sides, one pudding, two coffees (£9), one soft drink (£4.10), one bottle of wine (£49), including service.

Value for money? Yes.

Go again? Yes. This is every bit as great as we all had hoped; an immediate London classic.

FOOD	10/10
ATMOSPHERE	9/10
SERVICE	9/10

TOM'S TOTAL 28/30

■ Anne's bill for two: £175

Meat fruit (£12.50), mushroom broth (£12.50), cod in cider (£22), braised celery (£20), fries (£4), tipsy cake (£10), brown bread ice-cream (£8) two Campari sodas (£22), six glasses of wine (£57), two coffees (£7).

Value for money? No.

Go again? No. We have had more fantastic dining experiences without going to quite so much expense.

FOOD	8/10
ATMOSPHERE	7/10
SERVICE	9/10

ANNE'S TOTAL 24/30

TOTAL 52/60

WANT TO REVIEW A RESTAURANT?

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