

## The Ledbury - and a summer recipe

7 May 2005 by JR

Within seconds of being handed the menu at The Ledbury in Notting Hill Gate, which Nigel Platts- Martin and Philip Howard of Mayfair's The Square [other restaurants in the group include Chez Bruce, La Trompette and The Glasshouse] have opened with the talented Australian chef Brett Graham in the kitchen, I had decided on my first course.

A salad of spring vegetables with quail's eggs and pea shoots may not sound like the most exciting dish in the world but it does incorporate one particularly worthwhile reason for eating out in the more seasonally conscious restaurants across the northern hemisphere for the next couple of months – a reason that is best summed up by the slogan 'let the kitchen brigade take the strain'.

Now that spring has finally taken hold, a definite change has taken place in how kitchens assemble, prepare and cook their dishes. Out have gone the slow cooked items, roasts and the bigger pieces of flesh and fowl, which don't take too long to prepare but because of their size and bulk take considerably longer to cook and then to finish with their requisite sauces. And in have come a series of ingredients whose cooking process is precisely the reverse.

Broad beans and asparagus can take no more than three minutes to cook once they are ready but far, far longer to prepare, particularly in the quantity that any busy professional kitchen will use them. On both sides of the Atlantic recently I have walked through professional kitchens and spotted, tucked away in a corner, a couple of guys putting the world to rights as they make an impact on that day's delivery of several boxes of broad beans. Rather than me was my reaction.

Peas, sprouting broccoli of different colours, pea shoots and sweet Jersey royal potatoes all fall into the same category of being extra delicious to eat if someone else has had to spend their time preparing them for the pot, as do those fiddly baby vegetables – leeks, fennel, beetroot and carrots – which will be available in a fortnight. And such a list does not include the potentially more painful nettles currently featuring on one or two menus – over at Blueprint Café by Tower Bridge the ebullient chef Jeremy Lee is serving a nettle and wild garlic soup which requires, as he explained, well picked nettles being added to a broth of onions, leeks, celery and potatoes before being liquidised. It is almost too painful to imagine.

Our dinner at The Ledbury, which manages to combine comfort, chic design and obviously high culinary ambitions, involved no such pain. The salad was such a delight that I asked for and was sent the recipe which I hope will inspire readers to order if not to make for themselves once they have appreciated the painstaking vegetable preparation involved. This was followed by a dish of three different cuts of veal with a gratin of macaroni and girolles, a Bresse pigeon in a cep and Madeira consommé together with a very good value bottle of Waterstone California Cabernet Sauvignon 2001 (<sterling> 40) which, it is said, is effectively the third wine of one of Napa Valley's most famous cult wines. Service from a young team who have worked their way up through Platts- Martins' other restaurants and were led from the front by manager Helena Heli and sommelier Dawn Davies was equally impressive.

### Salad of Spring Vegetables with Quails Eggs and a Truffle Cream

For 4 people

12 spears of English extra select asparagus

100g green runner/ haricot beans

1 bunch of baby leeks

1 bunch of spring carrots

100g sugar snap peas

100g broad beans (out of the pod)

100g fresh peas

8 baby beetroot

12 quail eggs

2 egg yolks

30ml truffle vinegar

100ml truffle juice

few drops of truffle oil

350ml vegetable oil

1 small truffle, finely chopped

salt & pepper

1 tablespoon hazelnut oil

½ bunch of chives, finely chopped

1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar

pinch sugar

1 punnet of pea shoots, picked and washed

Bring a large pan of water to the boil and season generously with salt.

Place all the vegetables, separately, into iced water to refresh them. Peel the asparagus carefully, trim the leeks, peel the carrots and top and tail the sugar snaps and beans. One by one blanch these vegetables, at a rolling boil, until tender and refresh in iced water. All the vegetables should be cooked but remain al dente. Pop the broad beans out of their skins once cooked. Boil the beetroots gently in lightly salted water until tender, peel and finish with a tablespoon of balsamic vinegar and a pinch of sugar. Boil the quail eggs for two minutes and refresh in iced water and peel.

To make the truffle cream, blend the egg yolks, truffle vinegar and truffle juice in a blender with the salt. Gradually add the oil and finely chopped truffle. Adjust the seasoning. This should have the consistency of a thin mayonnaise.

(This will make more truffle cream than is required for 4 people, but it is difficult to make this cream in smaller quantities)

To finish the salad, put all the vegetables and pea shoots into a bowl and dress with the hazelnut oil and chives. Divide the salad between 4 plates. Cut the quail eggs in half and season. Drizzle the salad with truffle cream, garnish with the quail eggs and finish with the beetroots cut in half.

The Ledbury, 127 Ledbury Road, London W11 2AQ, 020 7792 9090 [www.theledbury.com](http://www.theledbury.com)

Dinner £39.50, lunch £24.50 (both three courses).

The Blueprint Café, SE1, 020-7378 7031