

## A London restaurant round- up

5 Jun 2004 by Nick Lander

As London approaches its busiest time of the year, looking lovelier than ever this year thanks to a combination of heavy rain and warm sunshine, I have invariably written a round up of where and how to enjoy the city. But the increasing amount of information available on the internet, including such useful city guides as [www.urbanpath.com](http://www.urbanpath.com), have now made this redundant.

Instead I have concentrated here on several new developments which have struck me as particularly exciting for the Londoner and the visitor alike.

**For the non- smoker** A few weeks before the recent report from Professor Konrad Jamrozik of London's Imperial College which catalogued the fact that as many as 700 people a year working in the hospitality industry in the UK may be fatally affected by 'passive smoking', talented and I believe far sighted chef Bruce Poole announced that he was banning smoking completely in his three highly rated restaurants: Chez Bruce in Wandsworth (020-8672 0114); La Trompette in Chiswick (020-8747 1836) and The Glasshouse in Kew, Middlesex (0208-940 6777) . After my recent experiences of eating out in New York and San Francisco which revealed that food and wine flavours are considerably, and not surprisingly, much sharper in non- smoking venues I do hope that many more London chefs will soon follow suit.

**For the tourist** Inn the Park (020-7451 9999) has opened in the heart of St James Park with great views across the gardens and lakes. This is a joint venture between Compass, the world's largest foodservice operator, and restaurateur Oliver Peyton. While I would have no hesitation in recommending its all- day café, its restaurant on the sunny evening we ate there was a great disappointment.

The kitchen certainly needs to pay far closer attention to the taste and seasoning of their dishes (and one reader reported being served a poussin complete with intact trussing string!). But what was even more conspicuous was the indifferent, almost cack- handed service that would leave any overseas visitor with the mistaken impression that nothing had changed in this country since the days of Fawley Towers.

**For the wine lover** There are happily an increasing number of restaurateurs who are equally enthusiastic about food and wine but there is no one I have ever met who is quite as passionate as Harry Gill, the proprietor of The Arches, 7 Fairhazel Gardens, London NW6 (020-7624 1867) , a five minute walk from Swiss Cottage tube station.

The Arches is entirely Gill's creation. It is a pub, open 365 days a year, but the bottles of wine standing behind the bar next to the optics are the kind that wine enthusiasts dream of. Thanks to Gill's wine trading acumen they are available at extremely keen prices. Ch Troplong Mondot 1964 was £60 a bottle, about the same as many West End establishments are asking for a lesser claret that is 30 years younger. The restaurant downstairs, complete with 19th century bakers' ovens, is atmospheric, if far from luxurious, and serves good food at equally fair prices.

**For the meat eater** Nobody could have predicted that the British beef industry would have recovered so quickly after the double blows of BSE and foot and mouth disease but, thanks to the hard work of many committed individuals and the correct focus on quality rather than quantity, this has definitely happened.

Restaurateurs are playing their part, too. The Greenhouse, W1 (020-7499 3331), which I reviewed in more detail last week, offers an English rare breed côte de boeuf for two but changes its source every week. And from Monday 07 Jun until Friday 18 Jun, Rules in Covent Garden (020-7379 0385) is running a special lunchtime menu featuring the beef from the highly unusual Belted Galloway cattle bred by Paul Coppen, a biochemist whose original career was with ICI, on what must be a very windswept hill farm on the borders of North Yorkshire and Durham.

**For anyone along the South Bank** The exciting walk along the Thames from the Design Museum to the London Eye has probably been the city's most conspicuous transformation over the past decade and coincidentally the number of good eating places along this route has increased hugely.

And although the food and drinks on offer at Amano (0207-234 0000), at the corner of Clink and Stoney Streets, a stone's throw from Borough Market, is not ground breaking it is a fine example of the 'fast casual' style of eating that is becoming increasingly popular. Amano's usp is its oven which bakes their olive oil flatbread topped with sea salt which form the outer wrapping for a large variety of fillings of the customer's choice (they also make pizzas and salads).

Judging by the range of customers which included businessmen, joggers, families and several drawn in from the rain by the baking smells, founders Ed Bentley and Jonathan Cooper seem to have created a highly promising format.

**For the adventurous** The Hoxton Apprentice Restaurant has just opened its doors at 16 Hoxton Square, NI (020-7749 2828 closed Mondays) with the short term aim of pleasing its customers but the much longer term goal of converting the long term unemployed into much- needed kitchen, bar and waiting staff with the requisite boost to their self- esteem.

The restaurant, part of the charity 'Training for Life' has received considerable financial support from the government, Compass, Whitbread and other industry suppliers, and has got off to a good start judging from our meal there in its first weeks. Certainly, the level of enthusiasm and commitment from the waiting staff could not be faulted and I am sure that the kitchen will get even better once it has the confidence to stamp its own identity on the menu which reads, not surprisingly at this stage of the restaurant's development, as though it has been devised by a committee rather than a Head Chef.

**For Indian food enthusiasts** On 07 or 08 jun the hugely talented Indian chef Vineet Bhatia gingerly emerges from behind the builders' rubble that has sadly marked the end of The English Garden, at 10 Lincoln Street in Chelsea, to take charge of his own restaurant, Rasoi Vineet Bhatia which translates literally as Vineet Bhatia's Kitchen. (020-7225 18881 closed Sundays).

Bhatia's culinary skills were initially recognised at the Star of India before he became the culinary force behind Zaika, W8. But now with the full support of his family, involving the mortgaging of their home to realise his long- cherished dream of his very own restaurant, Bhatia assumes the mantle of chef/ proprietor for the first time.

**For wine bargain hunters** Douglas Blain and Peter McKay, owners of The Gore Hotel, 190 Queens Gate, SW7 (020-7584 6601, [www.gorehotel.co.uk](http://www.gorehotel.co.uk)) recently discovered a bricked up cellar containing 300 dusty bottles including 55 year old Rioja, 1964 Barolos and clarets from vintages back to 1966. Because some have lost their labels, and they are very mixed bag, they have decided to sell these off at 30 pounds per bottle on a lucky dip basis throughout June. During the first week, British Heart Week, all proceeds from this wine find will go to the British Heart Foundation.

