

J Sheekey

21 Jan 2002 by JR

A trip to Portugal last year with Tim Hughes, Sheekey's head chef, and four other chefs (an account of which will appear in the March issue of Conde Nast *Traveller* and on this site) was enough to convince me that Hughes is one of the most knowledgeable fish chefs around.

As well as pointing me towards the freshest examples whenever we were in food markets, Hughes also explained two interesting facets of the restaurant business.

The first is the high level of business on Sunday evenings which surprisingly brings not the highest number of covers but the highest spend of the week. Many of the customers are middle-aged to elderly couples, perhaps back from their country retreat, and without having to worry about getting children to school in the morning - or paying school fees. Others are American or Japanese executives who have flown in on the Sunday for a working week in the capital and who want to eat well and early before jet lag sets in.

Whatever their origin, this combination results in, Hughes reported, the highest sale of lobster, whole sea bass, caviar, oysters and good bottles of the week.

Hughes added that as Sheekey's developed it was beginning to convince its customers during the week to eat more adventurously - fewer grilled Dover soles was his wish - and a dish I ate today of rock eel Bordelaise with ceps (starter £8.50, main £14.75) is highly representative of Hughes's progressive culinary philosophy.

When I bumped into him on the way out of the restaurant, Hughes explained that they had been experimenting with this particular dish as a special of the day and that it had been so well received that it would shortly become a permanent fixture on the à la carte. Rich, robust cooking - and an ideal restaurant dish as, if prepared incorrectly at home, eel bones can be very painful indeed!

J Sheekey 28-32 St Martins Lane, London WC2 (tel 020 7240 2565)

In the heart of the theatreland and with a great value Sunday lunch menu which includes valet parking!