

A few thoughts from a hungry traveller

23 Nov 2004 by JR

- Many restaurant goers might be wondering at the gradual disappearance of chef/restaurateur Stephen Bull's name from across London. His Smithfield restaurant was sold and is now a Bierodrome; his St Martin's Lane changed hands and became Shiraz which has also now sadly closed and Bull is in the final throes of selling his original Blandford Street site just north of Oxford Street.

But Bull is still behind the stoves, now however on the more tranquil Welsh borders in a pub called **The Lough Pool Inn**, Sellack, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire (tel +44 (0)1989 730236). Here he is producing dishes such as black pudding fritters with beetroot relish, roast Middle White pork and Bramley sauce and omelette Arnold Bennett that are just as distinctive and flavourful as when he was cooking in London - but at country prices.
- I continue to be delighted and excited by the dexterity and imagination of many, many chefs, and the expertise of James Kirby, the chef at **Cotto**, Olympia, London W14 and his brigade is no exception.

What was exceptional about my meal at Cotto however was that Kirby displays these talents on the fixed price lunch menu (£15.50 two courses, £18 for three) as well as on the slightly more expensive à la carte. Most impressive was a salmon tartare served in a bowl on to which a waiter poured a translucent tomato and pepper consomme. This tasted as good as it looked and the only disappointment was that my guest rather than I had ordered it. Equally impressive if slightly less dramatic were fillets of bream with a pea and mint risotto and a vegetarian alternative to the full English breakfast incorporating polenta, poached eggs and ceps.

Cotto at 44 Blythe Road, London W14 (tel +44 (0)20 7602 9333) is a great boon to west Londoners and anyone who has spent too long on their feet at Olympia.
- Craig Thomas is another young chef delivering terrific flavours at keen prices at **Passion**, 119 Shirland Road, London W9 (tel +44 (0)20 7289 5667) which is open seven days a week.

The restaurant's location is not terribly impressive as it looks out directly onto a bus stop but the interior is definitely warm and cosy and the food fresh and exciting. I went vegetarian with a huge baked mushroom topped with a cheese spring roll and rocket pesto followed by roast artichoke with basil risotto, courgette flower served in a yellow pepper broth, both of which were excellent. According to our son the 'passion for chocolate' dessert is unbeatable. Set lunch £9.95.
- First there was the Good Food Show, then came the Restaurant Show and now as a sign of how times are changing there is the Bar Show, where most of the attendees other than your correspondent are under 25 and fully armed with a mobile phone, a cigarette and at least one drink in their hands.

For this, the second Bar Show, the number of exhibitors - which included drinks companies, bar fitting firms and cigar importers - were up 80% on last year because the growth in their sales, which used to come via restaurants, is now the result of the huge increase in the number of new bars and clubs around the country.

Tucked away in a small booth on the first floor was however a cool, calm oasis. **Belvoir Fruit Farms** in Lincolnshire have long produced a refreshing line of drinks and concentrated cordials but their latest range of organic fruit pressés, a blend of fruits, flowers and spices with sparkling water added, is their best yet. The initial range of organic pressés includes elderflower, lemonade and ginger beer, each tangy and thirst quenching. For

stockists and a taste of the British summer in a glass see www.BelvoirCordials.co.uk.

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Any lovers of sticky toffee pudding, a truly British classic, should log on immediately to www.StickyToffeePudding.co.uk which will take you directly to the Cartmel Village Shop in Cartmel, Cumbria (tel/fax +44 (0)15395 36201).

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The end of this year will see the retirement of two of London's longest serving chefs, Peter Kromberg at the Inter-Continental, Hyde Park and Michel Bourdin at The Connaught both of whom have given a great deal of pleasure to many restaurant goers over the years. Equally importantly, their knowledge and expertise will be sorely missed by the chefs of tomorrow.

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The French House Dining Room in Dean Street, Soho, one of London's most personal and atmospheric restaurants, closed its doors on Saturday, July 14th.

This is not due to lack of business but rather a decision on the part of the owners of The French House pub underneath to convert this space into a wine bar. Margot Henderson and Melanie Arnold, formerly chef/proprietors, will continue to run their outside catering business, **Nose to Tail Eating** (tel +44 (0)20 7836 5050) whilst looking for new premises.

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