



**Written by**  
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## The Lyan Cub



*Nick tries to enjoy, as well as admire, a somewhat Noma-influenced establishment in Hoxton.*

Any reviewer has to tread very carefully when dealing with a restaurant such as The Cub, which opened just over 18 months ago on Hoxton Street in East London.

This restaurant and the people behind it aim to exemplify the restaurant of the future. On a piece of paper that was handed to me as I paid the bill, via an iPhone, thereby doing away with an extra piece of paper, was written: 'Sustainable living doesn't have to be about sacrifice and luxury doesn't have to be about waste. We are trying to explore a new form of sustainability; beyond foraging, beyond closed-loop and beyond seasonality.'

So too with the manner in which the restaurant has been put together: from the tables made from yoghurt pots and the recycled clay walls that filter minerals in the air, to the decision to

open the place only four nights a week so that – contrary to the 80-hour week common in the industry – staff get a decent break. That is the theory.

And as at Noma, all the waiting staff are converts to the cause, inspired by the owners' philosophy and only too keen to pass on their message. Walking into Cub on a cold and rainy night did bring a smile to our faces: the interior is handsome, the banquettes are a brightly coloured yellow and cheerful; and the all-male crew welcoming and smiling. (The smart lavatories boast drawings on the outside of the cubicles that make guesswork completely unnecessary and thus do away with customer confusion.)

On the menu and outside the sliver of a room there is The Cub's mantra, 'Good Things To Eat and Drink' – a high bar for the trio behind it to live up to. They include mixologist Ryan Chetiyawardana (the multi-award-winning bartender known as Mr Lyan – hence, presumably, the restaurant's name) and chef and champion composter Doug McMaster of the UK's first zero-waste restaurant Silo in Brighton. Flavour scientist Dr Arielle Johnson, formerly of Noma now at MIT Media Lab in Boston in the US, is Cub's go-to boffin. (None of them was in evidence on the night we ate there).

The Cub occupies a narrow space (above a basement that was Mr Lyan's original cocktail bar) into which tables that can seat about 20 in total have been cleverly situated as well as a bar and cooking area. Behind this work three young men, the majority of them either bearded, tattooed or both, in what is their small, communal working area. On the front of the bar, quite unusually, are two heat lamps that are normally found by the pass in a kitchen.

Our paper menu arrives. It clearly states at the top that what ensues will be a set menu of snacks, drinks and food, that will be charged at £67 per person, that this is available for the whole table only and that this will be subject to a service charge, all of which goes, quite rightly to the staff. My total bill comes to £151.88.

The menu is also unusual in the combination of symbols that it uses. There are twelve items on it dotted about in slightly inexplicable columns. Six are drinks, symbolised by a glass, and six are plates of food, symbolised by a knife and fork. The reverse of the menu lists bread and butter at £4, which we were given free, and one other course, of Cornish Gouda at £10. Under the heading 'good things to drink' there is an array of additional possibilities. The heading for wines by the glass warns us that these are served 'on rotation'.

The first drink is a very small coupe of Krug Grand Cuvée champagne ID117012, chosen because of the amount of information this house openly divulges, to which the bartender had added an unnecessary cube of 'water jelly'. There then followed the best dish of the evening.



This was a tart made of the thinnest slices of beetroot into which had been placed some absolutely delicious sweet and sour rhubarb. The crunch of the beetroot against the softness of the rhubarb was delightful, and the whole was topped with thin shavings of rhubarb. This was more appealing than the barbecued broccoli that accompanied it.

There followed another drink, of nettles, watercress, and pear juice with a bit of vodka, apparently, topped with an unnecessary sprig of parsley, and an elaborate dish of Lyme Bay mussels, topped with thinly sliced Tokyo turnips and meadowsweet flowers. This was a dish that was enjoyable to eat but rather spoiled by the fact that our waiter proudly pronounced that these were Cornish mussels whereas the Lyme Bay mussel farm is off Devon, but this is a minor quibble.



Then came a dish that had a knife and fork next to it but was in fact a bowl of a broth of hay-smoked artichoke that was definitely missable. At this point came our only glass of wine. Given the owners' approach and the restaurant's location, it came as no surprise that it was a glass of extremely natural wine, a cloudy Catalan, Pensa Blanca La Rumbera 2016.

The final two savoury dishes were very similar. Firstly, there was the kitchen's variation on 'leek and potato' in which my potatoes were under-cooked and the menu omitted the dish's most delicious and obvious ingredient, a pile of crisp, sweet, fried onion crumbs. It was eerily similar in its presentation and heavily citrus-influenced buttery sauce to our final savoury dish, a slice of a thick abalone mushroom, served on sprouted grains, this time with a similar but browner sauce whose main constituent is apparently the equally dark Toast Ale, brewed in Yorkshire and made from unsold loaves from bakeries and unused crusts from sandwich makers. A laudable enterprise.



Three more drinks were cited on the menu. Bruichladdich with Cox's apple juice and koji

chamomile had a lot more flavour than a rather watery mixture of teas and Cornish honey. Finally came more rhubarb - this time blended with the cocoa-bean husks that chocolatiers invariably reject. I can now see why. Cognac in the mix was mentioned but not tasted. Perhaps it too was defeated by the cacao husk.

Dessert was some of last year's cherries, preserved in sake, with buttermilk, and wafers made from linseed that broke and got in between our teeth.

There is no doubt that The Cub is superbly well intentioned. But the whole meal, as well as the drinks on offer, reminded me of nothing other than the ad campaign waged by Wendy's Hamburgers in the 1980s, when an elderly lady pointed at an empty burger and exclaimed 'Where's the beef?'

Almost £152 for two is a considerable amount to pay for dinner for two without anything really substantial in the way of food or drink. My picture below shows the range of glasses I left. I don't believe that the amount of spirits in any of them was overly generous. (This was one of the rare occasions Jancis has left the dinner table with a headache - too little alcohol, perhaps?)



And so it was with the food. There was not a single expensive ingredient on the menu: rhubarb (twice!); broccoli; mussels; leeks and potatoes; abalone mushrooms; and cherries. Their food gross profit must be extraordinarily high.

The future may well be proteinless, meatless as well as fishless, but there has to be a more appetising alternative - and surely it is incumbent upon those who espouse this kind of future to promulgate it?

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