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Review of the reviews

London Evening Standard

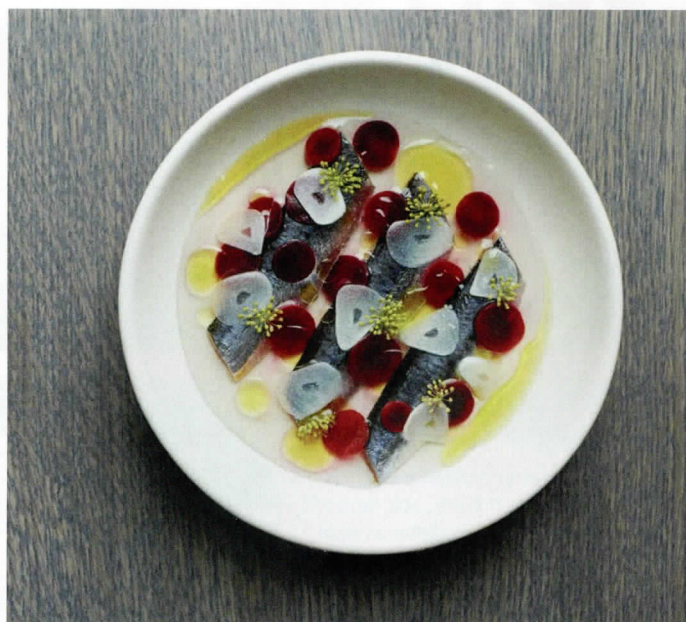
The first things we ate elicited nerdy appreciation and low, indecent groans. Nestled in a grey-accented, faintly Nordic room, an old pal and I descended, with building enthusiasm, on fantastic bread and a humming, dollopable green sauce. Pistachio choux and liver parfait similarly banded: a puffed, savoury profiterole with crumbled nut, thin strands of pickled kumquat and a blast of rich, sweet chicken liver. A three-quid mouthful but a pretty unassailable one.

Smoked sakura cherry tomato tart – bursting toms in a brittle, buttery case with their sweetness and bonfire musk balanced on a thrilling knife-edge – was another pastry-based mic drop.

A consommé-style French onion soup (with a playful accompanying cheese custard and walnut pickle-blobbed biscuit) was clean, elegant and nowhere near as satisfying as the Gruyère-clattered, brown allium lagoon I had imagined.

That feeling of slightly obstructive cleverness permeated the next arrivals; a lacquered square of suckling pig with mint root jelly (notable for the sensational, earthy grunt of anchovy-spiked stewed kale) and blocks of lamb (glinting a perfect rose and served with a coarse, tangy

Patrick Powell's cooking at **Allegra** at the Stratford hotel in east London has "an uncommon creative energy, focus and technical meticulousness", writes Jimi Faruwema



"The first things we ate elicited nerdy appreciation and low, indecent groans"

romesco sprinkled with strange, sticky olive 'caramel').

Puddings were a honey cake with a tumble of sharp blackberries and buttery puff pastry ice-cream, plus an appreciably egg baked custard with a hazelnut sponge, cobnuts and dreamy sabayon. These had a focus and poise that meant, whatever the grumbles about atmosphere and fussiness, we left with an appreciation that this is a special kitchen.

Rating: ambience: 3/5; food: 4/5. Price: £182 for two with drinks

The Guardian

Grace Dent enjoyed the old-school glamour at Jason Atherton's the **Betterment** in London's Mayfair

Our meal is much more hearty than the menu suggests: on paper it is a cacophony of snow pea, langoustine crudo and horseradish velouté. In actuality, chalk steam trout and potato cake with curry sauce is a tarted-up fishcake in a puddle of light, coronation-style liquor: delicate, fishy and finickity in design, but still dinner.

John dory with a sauce of coco de Paimpol beans and bordelaise sauce is really very little to get het up about. Short-rib with Montgomery Cheddar does exactly what it promises: it is an assertive, umami-heavy, emotional battering of bone marrow-encrusted, meaty, cheesy decadence; if you have that with the fried onion and "chips",



which are fried in beef dripping and come with a ketchup laced with truffle, you may find yourself in need of a sedan chair.

This won't be aided by a slice of the generously portioned dark chocolate tart with deeply scented Tahitian vanilla ice-cream.

Jason Atherton may not have opened the best restaurant in the West End of London this year, but he has opened a more delicious one than Gordon Ramsay. The battle isn't over, but this time Atherton has got the Betterment of him.

Rating: food: 7/10; atmosphere: 7/10; service: 7/10. Price: about £70 a head à la carte, plus drinks and service

The Mail

Tom Parker Bowles is won over by Cantonese comfort food at **Wun's Tea Room** in London's Soho

We eat salty, chilli-dusted peanuts with crisp slivers of dried fish that crunch and leave the mouth a-tingle. Then HK Wind Shelter – whole white-bait, lightly battered and hidden among a crunchy mess of deep-fried garlic, dried chillies and tiny rings of spring onion. The flavours are robust, no-nonsense, bar-snack Cantonese.

There are delicate triangles of creamy tofu in a crisp shell, dipped into sharp vinegar, and a crisp, fresh peanut, red onion, fried noodle salad. Which offers brisk relief from the bubbling wok. Satay beef noodles (not dissimilar to Super Noodles) wallow in a rich, coconut-heavy gravy, and are topped with a

frilly edged fried egg, while sticky, chewy claypot rice, the pot searing hot, comes studded with slippery mushrooms and soft chunks of pumpkin.

Then there's the Ibérico char siu, of which much has already been written. It is to the usual roast pork what jade is to green glass. Coated in sugar, this is both sweet and savoury, chewy and tender, and lavishly, lasciviously fatty. You can't stop eating the stuff, and too much is simply not enough. I go back again a few days later, just for one more plate. Washed down with a pot of clean, grassy Sichuan green tea.

Rating: 4/5. Price: about £25 per head

